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DASHING DICK; OR, Trapper Tom's Castle.

A CLEAR LAKE MYSTERY.

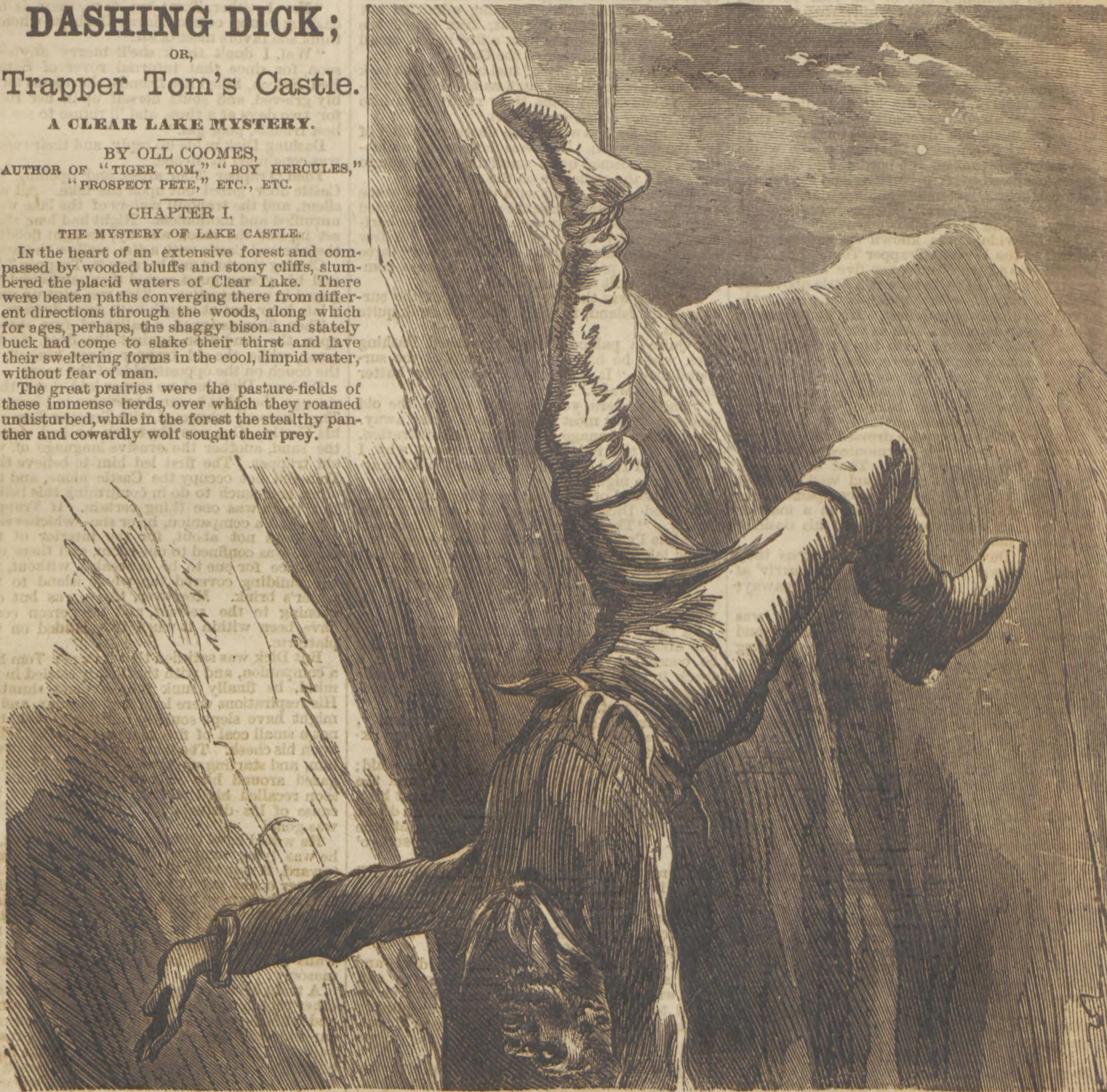
BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "TIGER TOM," "BOY HERCULES,"
"PROSPECT PETE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF LAKE CASTLE.

In the heart of an extensive forest and compassed by wooded bluffs and stony cliffs, slumbered the placid waters of Clear Lake. There were beaten paths converging there from different directions through the woods, along which for ages, perhaps, the shaggy bison and stately buck had come to slake their thirst and lave their sweltering forms in the cool, limpid water, without fear of man.

The great prairies were the pasture-fields of these immense herds, over which they roamed undisturbed, while in the forest the stealthy panther and cowardly wolf sought their prey.



TRAPPER TOM HUNG IN MID-AIR OVER THE CHASM, CLUTCHING WILDLY AT SPACE FOR SUPPORT.

But at length the red-man pushed his conquests into the West, and pitched his wigwam upon the margin of the lake and the shores of the rivers; and then he became lord of the land. Here, then, in all his characteristic glory, he reigned supreme—hunted the deer in the woods, the bison upon the plain, and took the fish from the waters; and, too, he wooed his dusky mate and took her for his slave. He basked his form in the suns of winter, and lolled beneath the forest shades in summer, dreaming of naught else than savage bliss and glory, until they were finally startled from their dreams by a strange noise echoing through the forest.

It was the crack of the white man's rifle.

The foot of the invader was upon their shores.

The pale-face had at last pushed across the Father of Waters, and had come to contend with the red-men, as their forefathers contended with the Huron, the Mohawk, the Iroquois and the Delaware.

The tomahawk and scalping-knife were now sharpened, and bows strung anew. The old spirit of savage vengeance, which for a while had been nursed in indolent bliss and repose, was once more aroused, and the spiteful crack of the invader's rifle was answered by the defiant war-whoop of the savage.

And so a summer sun of the year 18—had just sunk behind the western hills when two men paused on the eastern shore of Clear Lake and gazed out upon the smooth, pulseless bosom of the little sheet.

Both were white men, and, as their garbs and weapons denoted, both were bordermen. One was an elderly man, the other young. The former was about fifty years of age; but then time had made but little inroad on the strong and healthy *physique* of this man, whose whole life had been spent on the border, and had become hardened to its privations and exposures. His features were somewhat angular, as was also his powerful form. His eyes were of a soft brown, his hair and whiskers gray.

This individual was known throughout that section of the West as Trapper Tom. His companion was a man of not over five and twenty years of age. In form he was a little above the medium height, with muscular limbs, wide shoulders and swelling chest. His eyes were of a dark gray color and keen as the hawk's. His head, which showed both intellectuality and force of character, was covered with a growth of raven-black hair that hung far down his back. Withal he was a handsome man, whose general expression was that of a brave, yet wild, dashing, reckless spirit.

Both of these men were dressed in buckskin garments, whose style harmonized with their age and general character. That of Trapper Tom was plain, well made, and well polished with long use; while that of his companion was neat and clean, and ornamented in a manner that lent an additional grace to his dashing spirit and movements.

"Thar, Dick," said Trapper Tom, as they paused on the edge of the lake, "we're arriv' at Clear Lake, and if you'll jist look hereaways you'll see Lake Castle."

Dashing Dick, as the young borderman was called, looked in the direction indicated, and saw a small, conical-shaped stone building standing out in the center of the little lake.

"Ah, yes," replied the young man, "I see it; and so there is where you, Trapper Tom, live in defiance of the Red Falcon and his host?"

"Yes, that's Lake Castle, where I've lived for two years, and the devil got every red-skin that ventured in gun-shot o' the fortress," replied the old trapper, with a chuckle. "No, siree, Dick, a red foe has never see'd inside o' Lake Castle, nor a white 'un, either. I'm thunderin' periticler who I take into it."

"You may regret taking me there," replied Dashing Dick, with a jocular laugh.

"Nay, nay, Dick," responded the trapper; "I'm too good a judge o' human nater to think you'd ever go back on me. Besides, I've hearn too much o' Dashin' Dick not to know he's the true blue and a royal good feller."

"Thanks, Trapper Tom, for the compliment. It was to avail myself of the honor of being a guest of Trapper Tom, at his famous Lake Castle, that brought me all of twenty weary leagues from the southward."

"Then you sha'n't be disappointed, Dick. Come, and we'll soon be within the walls of the Castle."

I will here remark that Trapper Tom and Dashing Dick had met for the first time that day. Each was unknown to the other, save by reputation, but within an hour after they met, they became as familiar as though they had known each other for years.

Trapper Tom invited Dick to share his retreat with him that night, and the young hunter accepted. In fact, Dashing Dick had brought about that meeting so as to gain admission to Lake Castle. A mystery connected with the stronghold of this old trapper he had determined to solve if possible.

It required but a few minutes' paddling to reach the trapper's home. The structure was oblong in shape, built entirely of stone, and covering a space perhaps twenty feet long by twelve in width. It had been erected upon a sand island, and so close to the water all around that the waves washed its basement stones. It had been well put together, its construction displaying no little mechanical skill. In front of the door was a stone platform extending out into the water some ten feet. Tom pulled his canoe alongside of this, and landed thereon. He was immediately followed by Dashing Dick; then, having drawn his canoe from the water upon the platform, the old trapper turned to his cabin door.

This, after he had gone through a number of motions, wheezed upon its great hinges and admitted the master and his young guest to the interior.

By this time it was nearly dark, and, as the open door and the single small window in the arched stone roof of the building admitted but little of the remaining light, Tom closed the door and proceeded to strike a fire in the small fire-place in one corner of the Castle.

There being a supply of fuel on hand, his task was soon accomplished, and, as the flames gathered volume, they shot their ruddy rays into every corner of the apartment.

Dashing Dick saw that the Castle consisted of but the one room. This was large and commodious, but seemed quite small in proportion to the size of the structure on the outside.

The walls were lined with dry peltries, some traps and clothing, while the ceiling was studded with chunks of dried venison suspended to horizontal poles by strips of fibrous bark. A few cooking utensils, a rude table, two or three stools, and a pallet of furs and blankets, composed the outfit of Lake Castle.

The floor was the dry, white sand of the surface of the island, in which the foot sunk quite an inch.

"Quite a palace, Tom," remarked Dashing Dick when he had obtained a view of the surroundings; "It would take cannon to batter down these walls."

"Onc't in here, you're safe," replied the old trapper; "ther most danger lies in gittin' away. But I allers manage that to a demunstration, and as to the reds kapterin' the place, why, I have licked Red Falcon and twenty o' his warriors in one night."

"I've heard of your valorous fighting, Tom," responded Dick, searching the trapper's face closely. "The Indians think the Castle is haunted, while I've heard more than one hunter of the lower lakes say that they were satisfied that Lake Castle contained *more than one inmate*."

"Ther nation!" exclaimed Trapper Tom, with a slight start. "Who said so?—what do you think about it?"

"I think it all a mistake, for I'm sure I see no one about, nor any place where any one could be concealed. But I must say that here is a track in your sand floor that was never made by your foot. It's too small—more like a woman's footprint."

Dashin' Tom started again, this time more violently, and, advancing, he bent over the track and examined it closely.

"That must be my own track," he said; "you see, the sand has worked in 'round the edges and filled it partly up. But I must keep a close look-out, for the red-skins are no doubt taxin' their brains for some way to get into the Castle. That track, tho', 's mine; I'm sure o' it."

"It may be possible," replied Dick, "but I'll swear it looks like a woman's footprint."

"A woman's? Ho! ho! ho! A woman in old Tom Strothers's Castle? Why, Dick, the ijee's ridiculous," and the old trapper went off into another roar of laughter.

The subject was here permitted to drop, and Tom set about preparing something to eat. This was soon accomplished; then Dick was invited to partake, and, accepting the hospitality of his host, the young hunter was soon discussing topics of various natures over the supper with Tom.

"And the Indians," remarked Dick, when the conversation touched upon this subject, "you think, do you, Tom, intend to make a clean sweep of the settlers?"

"I believe it's in the heart of that infurnal

Red Falcon to kill every settler in the Territory o' Iowa. He's the bloodiest-hearted devil that ever roamed unscalped, Dick. His name will cause the hair to raise on a white settler's head if spoken in the dark. But, I've got my eyes open for Red Falcon, and he's a dead chief if he ever gits within range o' my rifle."

"I hope you will get a chance at him soon, Tom, and stop the bloody work he began by slaying Arthur Winslow, his wife and little ones."

"Yas, and tried to kapter your gal, Dick."

Dashing Dick flushed red in the face, and appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Oh, ye needn't take on, Dick," added the trapper; "I've heard 'bout ye bein' up to Prairie View, makin' love to Miss Pauline Winslow; and I've heard you war goin' to marry her."

"Some of those reports," returned Dashing Dick, "may be true, but some I'm afraid never will be true, Tom."

"Why so, Dick, why so?"

"I have two rivals, you know."

"Tut! tut!" replied Tom; "it's natural as life for everybody to fall in love with that gal, fur, I sw'ar, she's the poorest and sassiest little angel I ever see'd. I don't think she cares a straw fur Captain Charley Temple."

"Nor I, either, Tom; but, then, there is her dashing young cousin, Harry Herbert, whom I think she favors most of all."

"Wal, I don't think she'll marry anybody soon, for, since that infurnal rover of Satan, Red Falcon, killed her friends, she seems terribly grieved, and shuts herself up in her room for two days at a time, and I'll refuse to see her best friends, poor gal."

Dashing Dick made no reply, and their repast was concluded in silence.

Then Trapper Tom arose, and opening the Castle door, gazed out upon the lake. All was silent, and the tranquil waters of the lake were unruffled and motionless. Night had long since set in, but the moon was up, its light flooding the lake and Castle with a dim, mellow radiance.

Closing the door and barring it, Trapper Tom and his young guest seated themselves and engaged in conversation. This was kept up until a late hour, but at length both grew drowsy.

Then Tom assigned a pallet of furs, spread upon the sand-floor against the door, to his guest, while the old trapper threw himself on the couch on the opposite side of the room.

Dashing Dick had no sooner laid down than strange thoughts began to revolve in his mind. They were all connected with Trapper Tom and his Castle. One was the track he had seen in the sand, another the evasive language of the old trapper. The first led him to believe that Tom did not occupy the Castle alone, and the other had much to do in confirming this belief. But there was one thing certain. If Trapper Tom had a companion, he or she—whichever it was—was not about, for the interior of the Castle was confined to one room, and there was no place for one to be concealed without, for the building covered the whole island to the water's brink. Moreover, there was but one opening to the retreat, and no person could have been within it when they landed on the platform.

But Dick was satisfied that Trapper Tom had a companion, and with this firmly settled in his mind, he finally sunk into a sound slumber. His respirations were long and regular, and he might have slept soundly until daybreak, had not a small coal of fire snapped out and fallen upon his cheek. The sharp, stinging pain awoke him, and starting up into a sitting posture, he gazed around him in bewilderment. But he soon recalled his situation and discovered the cause of his disturbance. But Trapper Tom was gone!

He would have thought little of this, but, as he was lying against the door, which opened inward, it seemed a little singular that the old trapper could get out without disturbing him. For, as before stated, there were no openings in the Castle save the one door and the small holes in the arched roof. But might there not be some secret opening? He glanced at the walls around him, but they were all of solid masonry.

A train of thoughts now began to chase each other rapidly through the young hunter's mind, and while he was occupied with these, his keen ear suddenly caught the sound of suppressed voices. This aroused his curiosity to the highest pitch, and bending his head, he listened intently to catch the words of those, whoever they were, that were engaged in conversation. He could hear the voices, low and suppressed. One appeared to be a man's, the other

a woman's, but he could distinguish the words of neither. In fact, the sound was so very faint that he could not locate the point from whence it came, for the variations of the two voices made it, or seemed to make it, come from different points outside of the Castle.

Turning, the young trapper applied his eye to a small crack in the door in hopes of gaining some clew as to who the colloquists were; but he saw no one. He applied his ear to the crack and listened. The voices had become hushed, but something like the dip of a paddle came to his ears. But this, too, soon died away, and then Dick turned his back upon the door again.

A cry arose to his lips as he did so, but it was promptly suppressed. On his couch, on the opposite side of the Castle, he saw Trapper Tom lying wrapt in apparent slumber!

The young hunter bit his lips till the blood almost came to assure himself that he was not dreaming, for this sudden and silent transition of the old trapper's form into the Castle seemed more like a dream than reality. He was completely dumfounded, and threw himself upon his couch without making the slightest noise, or uttering a word. But he had become firmly convinced that Trapper Tom and Lake Castle were involved in some strange mystery.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE CONFLICT.

DASHING DICK again fell asleep, pondering over the mysteries connected with Lake Castle and its master. His heavy respirations told that he slept soundly.

No sooner had he fallen asleep than Trapper Tom began to move restlessly on his couch. At length he opened his eyes, raised up on his elbow, and gazed around.

The fire had burned low, and only a sickly twilight pervaded the room. So the old trapper arose to his feet and threw a few dry sticks of wood on the red coals.

A bright glow soon lit up the apartment, then the trapper turned and stole softly to the side of the sleeping hunter. Bending over him, he gazed down into the handsome face, expressionless in slumber.

"Can it be," the old trapper mused—"can it be possible this youth is that person whose name is upon every lip? Is it possible that that man is a guest of Trapper Tom? I swar it don't seem possible, but I reckon time'll tell."

The trapper turned and stole back to the fire. Then a strange sound broke upon his ears. He started up, grasped his trusty rifle, and examined the priming with a keen and experienced eye.

"Ho, Dick, my boy!" he then shouted, in stentorian tones.

The young hunter instantly started from his slumber.

"What—what is up, Tom?"

"The heathens—the minions of Red Falcon are coming to try the Castle again."

"Jerusalem! then we are to have a fight, eh?" and Dick arose, arranged his clothes, and took down his rifle.

"Yes, and a sharp fight it'll be," replied Tom, scanning the face of the young hunter, closely.

Then he went to the door, opened a concealed wicket, and gazed out.

A low exclamation escaped his lips. He saw a long bateau glide alongside the platform in front of his door. He saw a dozen powerful Sioux Indians spring out onto the landing. Then a rush was made for the door. A wild yell rent the air; crashing blows fell upon the door—it yielded!

"Good God!" burst from Trapper Tom's lips; "the door was left unbolted! Come, Dick, my boy, put your shoulder to the door. We must keep the red hellions out, or our hair will have to come."

The old trapper braced his shoulder against the door and was assisted by Dick. The inward pressure was checked by this resistance, but it soon became evident that a greater force was being brought to bear outside, and that the door must soon yield.

"Heave ag'inst her, Dick, heave ag'inst her yer best," cried the old trapper, concentrating all his strength into one mighty effort; "if we can only git it back to its place and shoot the bolt, then—ah, there!"

"Heavens! what does that mean?" cried Dashing Dick.

The pressure against the door was suddenly withdrawn, and a wild, savage yell, mingled with fearful shrieks and cries and the sharp crash of firearms, fairly rocked the Castle, and rendered the night hideous.

"What does it mean, Tom? what does it mean?" repeated Dashing Dick, manifesting no little agitation.

"I don't know, Dick," replied Tom, a puzzled expression passing over his bronzed, bearded face, and a strange light burning in his eyes.

They bent their heads and listened. They could hear sounds that were evidence of a terrible conflict going on without on the platform. They could hear the cracks of pistols, dull, crunching blows, shrieks and groans of agony, the dull thud of heavy bodies falling upon the platform, or being hurled with fearful violence against the Castle's walls, and now and then a thunderous splash in the water.

"It's some trick to get us out," said Trapper Tom, who had taken advantage of this diversion to bolt the door.

"No, Tom; I verily believe friends have come to our assistance, and are engaged with the Indians."

Trapper Tom made no reply but opened the wicket and gazed out upon the combatants. He saw them engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter, surging to and fro so rapidly that the eyes could not follow their movements. Some were up and some were down, and now and then a pair, locked in each other's deadly embrace, would go spinning across the platform into the water, where the struggle was continued to the death.

"What is the trouble, Tom?" asked Dick, with dire impatience.

"Look fur yerself, Dick; I can't distinguish one body from the other, they're mixed up so," replied the old trapper, withdrawing from the wicket.

Dick glanced out through the aperture, but he was a moment too late. A great cloud trailed its tattered shreds across the moon's disk, wrapping all in darkness without. The young hunter, however, could see the dark forms surging to and fro on the platform, but he could not discriminate between them. He could not tell whether those that had attacked the savages were white men, or the worst foes of the Sioux, the Arapahoes. But, whichever it might be, they were pressing the savages hard. The conflict was a fierce and desperate one, and by this time had been transferred to the lake around the base of the platform, where flying arms and feet, and whirling and falling bodies beat and churned the water to a foam.

"By Heaven, Trapper Tom!" said Dashing Dick, excitedly, "I believe it is friends—white friends, too, that have come to our assistance. If so, we are not doing our duty remaining shut up in here."

"True, Dick," replied Tom; "but I war afraid at fust it war all a sham to draw us out. We can go out yit, and lend a helpin' hand."

"Then unbar the door—quick. I'm afraid we're too late. The noise has subsided as if by magic. The conflict must be at an end."

The door was unfastened and the two rushed out onto the platform. True enough, they found the conflict had ended, but not a living warrior was to be seen. But there was fearful evidence of the struggle all around them. The platform was slippery with human gore, and the wall of the Castle was bespattered with dark clots of the life-liquid. Three motionless forms lay upon the landing, and a fourth one was hanging over the edge, the blood dropping from a fearful gash in the head into the lake.

Dashing Dick advanced and examined these forms. All were Sioux warriors of Red Falcon's band. They were scalps and presented a shocking spectacle with their grim faces wearing the last agonies of death, upturned in the ghostly moonlight. The long bateau in which the savages had reached the Castle still lay alongside the platform.

With a keen eye the young hunter swept the surrounding waters, but not a living object could be seen upon the glassy surface.

Who were the victorious assailants, and where had they vanished so quickly and silently? Were they the avenging spirits that Indian tradition had said haunted the waters of Clear Lake, and guarded the Castle of their arch companion, Trapper Tom?

These were the questions that Dashing Dick asked himself, but he could arrive at nothing definite in regard to them, and the more he pondered over the matter, the more complicated the mysteries grew.

"Thar's been a bloody battle here, Dick, I swar," said Trapper Tom. "Red Falcon's varlets have got it waxed to 'em. But who done it, and whar have they gone to? Surely they weren't all killed. By jing, it's curious."

"Couldn't you tell where the victorious assailants are, Trapper Tom?" asked Dick, fixing his eyes upon the old trapper's.

"Me tell? Why should I tell more about it than you, Dick? I'll admit it's curious they didn't make 'emselves known arter doin' us such a good turn. But I'll tell you my 'pinion. I think it war a party o' Arapahoes come here fur the same purpose the Sioux did—to karter Lake Castle. But finding the Sioux here, they got to fighting each other, for you know the two tribes are at the outs."

"The story seems plausible enough," thought Dashing Dick, "but in connection with what I have seen to-night, I believe Trapper Tom knows more about the affair than he is willing to admit. I am inclined to think it is one of the mysteries of Lake Castle, and—"

Here his train of reflections was interrupted by an exclamation from the lips of old Tom, who pointed toward the eastern shore of the lake where he had discovered a canoe, with a number of occupants well in under the shadows.

"That tells the story," he said; "it's been a pack o' Arapahoes that attacked the Sioux."

"But how could they escape so soon after the conflict ended without our seeing them?"

"Don't you know the ways of the red-skins are inscrutable, lad? When you've spent as many years among the varlets as I have, then you'll learn that thar's nothin' impossible for a red-skin to do but to git inside o' Trapper Tom's Castle," and the old trapper laughed heartily at his own conceit.

The subject was here permitted to rest, and Trapper Tom proceeded to remove the lifeless bodies from the platform and wash off the blood. By the time this was accomplished the moon had gone down, and that darkness which precedes dawn fell over the lake.

"Now is our time to go ashore, Dick," said the old trapper; "lurkin' Ingins won't see us land, and so they won't know but what we're in the Castle still. That's the how I work 'em."

"Well, I want to visit Prairie View to-day, and if there's danger in venturing ashore in the daytime, let us be off at once."

"That's it," replied Tom, and he proceeded to make ready for departure.

All was made ready, and having securely locked the castle door, Tom launched his canoe and the two took their departure. The eastern shore was reached and a landing effected in safety.

The canoe being concealed, the two proceeded a short way back into the woods, when Dick said:

"I suppose I will have to leave you now, friend Tom."

"I reckon so, if you're goin' down to the settlement. I can't go down thar to-day. I've got to look out for Red Falcon's scalp. But, should you ever drift up into these diggin's again, remember the latch-string of Lake Castle is allers out fur friends o' old Tom Strothers."

"I'll not forget you, nor Lake Castle, old friend; so good-morning to you," replied Dick, and thus the two parted, Dick going south and Trapper Tom east.

Dashing Dick's mind, as soon as he was alone, reverted to the mysteries of Lake Castle. He could not convince himself but that Trapper Tom had withheld some secrets from him, the main one of which was, of there being other occupants at the Castle besides the trapper. If so, why did he wish to keep the matter such a secret? Was he, under the guise of a hunter, harboring a band of outlaws or counterfeiters there?

As he stndied the matter over, he came to a halt, turned about, and retraced his footsteps back to the lake. He had determined to make some further investigations from the shore as soon as daylight came. If there were other occupants than Trapper Tom about the Castle, he would be likely to gain some evidence of the fact.

Cautiously he began scouting around the lake, and in the course of an hour he returned to the point from whence he had started. It was now daylight, and the sun had just come up.

The young hunter glanced across the lake toward the Castle. To his surprise, he saw a thin column of white smoke rising from its chimney-top. However, there was nothing very suspicious about this, for Tom had thrown a stick of wood on the fire before leaving, and it might be from this that the smoke was still rising. However, he kept his eyes upon the Castle and the surrounding waters, and evinced no little curiosity when he suddenly discovered a canoe filled with Sioux warriors move out from the west shore and head directly toward the old trapper's retreat.

"Ah! that will tell the matter," mused the young hunter, for he knew at a glance that the savages had been

or other, of the absence of its inmates, and intended to capture it.

With an anxious, throbbing heart he watched the long craft creeping across the water toward the structure. He was not so far away but that he could see the warriors were all powerful fellows and well armed, and painted and plumed for the war-path.

Slowly the craft creeps on. It is now within fifty paces of the Castle. Dashing Dick fixes his eyes upon the structure. He starts. He sees a number of little jets of white smoke puff out from the wall of the building. He hears the report of several rifles blended in one sullen roar come over the water. He hears a savage death-wail follow it. He sees a savage leap overboard into the lake from the advancing canoe, his arms beating the waves in the convulsions of death. Then he sees the craft turn about and make a hasty retreat shoreward, minus three of its occupants.

Dashing Dick started up. Something like a cloud of disappointment darkened his brow. Then, turning, he moves briskly away toward Prairie View, musing:

"By heavens, there are other occupants at Lake Castle! But they are not human; they must be invisible spirits—avenging angels. Yes, by Jupiter, *Lake Castle is haunted!*"

CHAPTER III.

A SINGULAR COMPACT.

PRairie View was a small settlement composed of about a dozen log-cabins, and perhaps fifty souls. A score of the latter were strong, able-bodied men, the rest women and children.

The settlement had been founded about two years previous to the opening of our story, and although it had been greatly harassed by the Indians under the notorious Red Falcon and had had a number of its horses and cattle stolen, it had suffered no loss of life but in a single instance.

About a month prior to the transaction we have already narrated, Red Falcon and about twenty of his warriors descended upon the cabin of one Thomas Winslow, who lived about a mile from the main village, and murdered all but one of the family. This one was a girl of eighteen, Pauline Winslow, whom Red Falcon had spared that he might carry her a captive to his lodge. In fact, her capture was the sole object that led the savage there, but, being a fearless girl, she escaped the villain's power and sought safety by flight under cover of night, to Prairie View, where she was received into the family of her uncle, Ishmael Haven.

Pauline was beautiful, but something besides mere beauty rendered her admired and loved by all whom she came in contact with. She was full of life, vivacious and kind-hearted, always carrying sunshine and joy into the saddest home and heart—ever welcome by old and young.

No one in the settlement could excel her in the use of the rifle or in feats of horsemanship. Her love of out-door sport and exercise had given her the strength of the commonality of men, besides imparting to her cheeks a healthy, rosy bloom; to her eyes a lustrous and joyous light; and to her form, grace and perfect development.

The death of her friends had, however, thrown a cloud of sorrow over her usually joyous heart and bowed her down with grief. In an hour's time the happy, light-hearted maiden had been made a sorrowing, weeping orphan. But her courage did not desert her. On the contrary, it became strengthened by an innate desire for vengeance on the despoilers of her home and happiness.

Her friends did all they could to console her, and, though she was the same kind-hearted girl, the soft light of her eyes and the music of her voice were gone—the one had deepened into a fire that found nourishment in a spirit of vengeance, while the other had been silenced in the bitterness of her grief.

As time wore on, however, her sorrow grew lighter, and she began to recover some of her past spirit; still she kept that hungry determination locked within her breast—a determination to see that her friends' unnatural deaths were avenged.

On the same day that Dashing Dick, the hunter, left Clear Lake, Pauline issued from the door of her uncle's cabin and moved away toward the woods north of the settlement.

She was dressed in a short frock, made of fine buckskin and ornamented with yellow fringe. In style it resembled that of the dress usually worn by an Indian queen or princess, with the

original in style with its wearer. A little scarlet cap with a scarlet plume surmounted her head, and from beneath this, clusters of dark ringlets escaped.

She carried a small, highly-finished rifle, with silver mountings, while at her side were suspended a fancy powder-horn and bullet-pouch, by means of a scarlet sash passing over her left shoulder. These had all been a gift from one whom rumor said she loved. The name of the donor as well as the recipient, was engraved on a silver plate on the stock of the piece, and as Pauline moved on into the shadows of the wild-woods, her mind absorbed in thought, she came to a sudden stop, dropped her rifle into the hollow of her arm, and glancing at the plate upon its stock, murmured the name:

"Charles Temple."

The name was involuntarily spoken aloud, but Pauline had no idea that there were ears about to hear her words until a figure pushed from a clump of maples at her side and said:

"Then the young squaw hunter loves him whose name is upon her lips?"

Pauline started, not through fear, but embarrassment. She turned and saw an Indian girl standing at her side, her dusky face aglow with some inward emotion. She was not over eighteen years of age, and her natural beauty was greatly enhanced by the gaudy dress she wore, and the glittering jewels that sparkled in her black, flowing hair. Her features were purely Indian, but full of expression and devoid of that gravity and stoical indifference so characteristic of her race.

Pauline recognized her at once. She had often been at Prairie View, and was known as Oolooah, the Indian Princess.

"Why, Oolooah, you here?" exclaimed Pauline, greatly embarrassed by the girl's sudden appearance, and by the question she asked.

"Yes," replied the dusky maiden, speaking the Saxon tongue quite fluently; "does not Oolooah come often to see her white sister?"

"You used to, Oolooah," replied Pauline, "but since Red Falcon has taken up the hatchet against the pale-faces, I supposed your friendship had turned with the spirit of your party?"

"Oolooah does not go on the war-path, neither does her white sister, and why should they be enemies?"

"They have no reason to be, Oolooah," replied Pauline; "but I have reason to hate your people, or many of them, at least."

"I know my white sister's troubles. Sorrow has fallen on her heart. Red Falcon and his braves slew her friends. Oolooah would have saved them, but the warriors' ponies were fleet than Oolooah's feet."

"Then you knew my home was to be attacked?"

"Yes; Red Falcon wanted you for a wife, and, to get you, he planned the destruction of your home and friends in secret; but Oolooah's ears were keen and heard the hiss of the serpent, but she could not save your friends from his sting."

"Oh, what a heartless wretch he is!" said Pauline.

"Oolooah would sink a dagger into Red Falcon's heart, if it would not put the stain of murder upon her hands. Red Falcon is a bad, cruel chief. He is an impostor. He filled the ears of the Sioux with falsehoods. He told them that the Great Spirit had sent him there to preside over the tribe. He did many strange things that led my people to believe his stories, and he was placed chief sachem over the tribe. He holds the place that Oolooah's lover should by right hold to-day. And when Elk Horn, Oolooah's lover, and his young chiefs conspired against the impostor, Red Falcon, a traitor betrayed them. Death would have been the penalty, but Elk Horn and his chiefs exiled themselves from the tribe. Some day, Red Falcon will fall, then will Elk Horn become chief of the Sioux, and friend of the whites."

"Oh, I pray that day will come soon, Oolooah!"

"It may come soon. The white hunter, called Trapper Tom, who lives at the haunted lake, is upon Red Falcon's trail with his spirits of vengeance that dwell with him in the Castle."

Pauline smiled at the maiden's remarks, and her belief in the superstitious yet popular tradition of Clear Lake being the abode of spirits.

"Then, if you are my friend, Oolooah," Pauline at length said, "perhaps you can tell me something of Red Falcon's future intentions, can you not?"

"Oolooah's white sister guesses well. I am here with news intended only for the ears of the white maiden. Let her follow me into yon thicket and listen."

Oolooah turned and entered a clump of bushes, closely followed by Pauline.

Here for several minutes they remained in a low conversation. When they again emerged from the thicket Oolooah's face wore a faint smile of triumph, while Pauline's was pale, and her eyes burned with the fire of some deep, inward emotion.

They conversed a few minutes longer, then parted. Oolooah went away northward, while our heroine moved on through the woods in a westerly direction, her mind absorbed in deep reflection.

The chatter of a squirrel in a tree-top overhead suddenly aroused her from her reverie, and glancing up through the foliage, she saw the little animal perched upon a bough. It presented a splendid mark, and raising her rifle, the maiden rested the barrel against a small tree, and taking a steady aim, pressed the trigger. There was a sharp report, a puff of white smoke, and the next moment the squirrel came crashing down through the foliage, shot through the head.

Advancing, the young huntress secured her game, and was about reloading her rifle, when a pleasant and familiar voice greeted her ear.

"A capital shot was that, Miss Winslow."

The maiden turned and saw Dashing Dick, the hunter, approaching. She greeted him kindly, but betrayed no unusual emotion nor embarrassment.

Dick advanced, and dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, leaned in a careless attitude upon the muzzle. Then, removing his cap to cool his heated brow, he said:

"Are you not afraid, Paulie, to be so far from the settlement?"

"Afraid?—of what, Mr. Thurman?"

"Red Falcon and his minions, to be sure! But please call me Dick, Paulie; 'Mr. Thurman' sounds too formal for a fellow like me."

The maiden smiled, and replied:

"Then, Dick, have you seen aught of Red Falcon and his warriors in this vicinity?"

"No," he responded; "but there is no telling how soon they may come; and then I shudder to think what will be the fate of Prairie View."

Pauline glanced like a startled fawn at the young hunter. Her face grew slightly pale, but to conceal her emotions, of which she was conscious, she began reloading her rifle.

A momentary silence ensued, then Dick continued:

"And now, Paulie, I desire to say, or rather repeat this, while I have the opportunity: I love you as man never loved woman before, and I pray my love be respected, if not reciprocated, and that you will grant me the boon of your hand and the right of being your protector through life."

Pauline was unmoved by this sudden confession of the young hunter. She had expected it from the first and was prepared to answer him.

"Dick," she said, in her matter-of-fact way, "I can not grant you the boon you ask—"

"Then you love another—either your cousin, Harry Herbert, or Captain Charley Temple," Dick broke in, in a tone of discouragement.

"I did not say so, Dick," Pauline continued. "I have resolved to marry no one while the assassin of my friends goes unpunished."

"Then you have turned an avenger, Paulie?"

"I will never rest," she replied, a wonderful light shining from the liquid depths of her dark eyes, "I will never be at peace of heart while Red Falcon lives. Yes, if you are so a mind to term it, I am an avenger in spirit, if not in act."

"Paulie," and the young man's voice grew strong with emotion, "intrust this work of vengeance to me. You, a feeble girl, could never carry out your resolutions in the face of the dangers and hardships to which it requires years for us strong and hardy men to become accustomed. Only give me some hopes for the future, Paulie, and the death of your friends shall be avenged."

"I will give you this assurance, Dick—the same that I gave my cousin, Harry Herbert: when you bring me the scalp of Red Falcon, then will I promise to become your wife!"

Dick was astonished by this strange proposal. He started, and his face grew pale and red by turns, and a light of hope and joy beamed in his fine, dark-gray eyes. Advancing, he took Pauline's little soft hand in his own hard palm, and in a tone tremulous with inward emotion, he said:

"Pauline, this is indeed a happy moment to me—to receive from your lips this rather singular promise, the fulfillment of which I shall exert every effort in my power to claim at an early day. Yes, Paulie, Red Falcon's scalp

you shall have from my hand, if twenty years—”

“Or,” interrupted Pauline, “if Harry Herbert does not get it before you do.”

“In that case, you will be lost to me forever.”

“Yes; the promise I made Harry shall be as binding as the one I have made you, and you may think strange of me for it, but I will admit that I can be equally happy as the wife of either you or Harry. Moreover, you may think me depraved and wanting in womanly sensitiveness to ask so bloody a gift as a human scalp, but I desire it as much as an assurance of your avowed love as the satisfying of my spirit that is crying out for vengeance on my friends’ destroyers.”

“Then you really care nothing for Captain Temple, do you, Paulie?”

“Is it not possible for me to love three as well as two?” was her evasive reply.

“I admit it is; but you either care nothing for any of us, or love but one. And since you have made no proposition to Captain Temple for Red Falcon’s scalp, I am half inclined to believe he stands first in your heart; however, I can submit to fate and your decision, and from this moment the sole object of my labor shall be to secure the scalp of Red Falcon. I feel certain of success, too, for I think I possess advantages over Harry Herbert.”

“In what respect?”

“In experience as a borderman. I have never seen Harry, but I have heard that he has only been on the border a short time.”

“That’s true, Dick; Harry has had but little experience on the border, and is young; and so there is one thing I desire to be explicitly understood between you and me, and it shall be understood between me and Harry; and that is a spirit of jealous rivalry between you and Harry will induce a forfeiture of my promise.”

“On my part, your desire shall be gratified. I will do anything for your love.”

“Then let this be a fair understanding between us, Dick.”

“It shall be, Paulie,” he replied, “and I am almost tempted to promise that, within the next week, I will bring you the scalp of Red Falcon.”

“Then, good-by, Dick,” she said, turning away toward Prairie View; “but,” she continued, glancing back over her shoulder with a world of meaning in her words, “be sure that you bring me the right scalp, that of Red Falcon, the Scourge of the Prairie.”

CHAPTER IV.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

A WEEK had passed since the strange compact between Dashing Dick and Pauline Winslow. It was night, and the moon hung in a cloudless sky. A light breeze drifting across the plain from out the East bore upon its wings the clatter of horses’ hoofs.

A figure, standing on the edge of the plain, caught the sound. The figure was that of our old friend, Trapper Tom.

He stood within the shadows of the forest that stretched away to Clear Lake, his rifle resting upon his arm. He bent his head and listened, for amid the pounding of the approaching hoofs far across the plain, he heard fierce, savage yells.

Some one he knew was being pursued by Indians. But who could it be? Not Dashing Dick, nor the young hunter, Harry Herbert. Some of the settlers of Prairie View, he concluded, must have ventured abroad and had run into danger.

The clattering hoofs drew nearer and nearer. There must be a host of them, for he can almost feel the earth tremble beneath the shock. He can now see a number of dark objects skimming across the plain like birds. There is a score of them—they are the approaching horsemen—the pursued and the pursuers.

The old trapper draws further back into the shadows of the trees; then becomes motionless with suspense and uncertainty.

The horsemen come on. They are now within a rod of him—now within arm’s reach—now gone, like the wind, into the dense shadows of the woods.

There were two of them—a man and woman. They were the fugitives from the score of mounted Indians that were thundering on in swift pursuit, but a dozen rods behind.

The old trapper got but a mere glimpse at the fugitives; but it was sufficient. It told him who they were—Dashing Dick and Pauline Winslow.

“By the shades of Tophet!” the trapper exclaimed aloud to himself, “it’s Dashing Dick

and Polly Winslow, and a fearful ride they’re havin’ o’ it. Whew! their horses war white with foam, and their own faces looked like snow. And the way they were goin’! why, if ‘twern’t for this speck of foam from one of the horse’s flanks, still quiverin’ on my hand, I’d swar’ they were specters, or else I’d been dreamin’. But, let me see; the shades of the forest will now give the fugitives the advantage, and they stand a good chance to escape. In case they do, they may aim for Lake Castle, and with me away they’ll not get in, so I’ll hoof it for the lake and be ready for whatever turns up. Strange, very strange, indeed, are some things in these diggin’s, and strangest o’ all is how Dashin’ Dick and his sweetheart, Polly Winslow, comes to be pursued by a pack o’ Red Falcon’s minions. I think that’s a mistake somewhar, and I hope it’ll turn out in favor o’ the boy.”

Turning, the old trapper glided away through the forest toward the lake.

In the mean time Dashing Dick and his fair companion were galloping on through the woods, with the savages still pressing close behind them.

Early that day Dashing Dick had called at Prairie View, and together he and Pauline had taken a pleasure ride to Lake Castle. In fact, Pauline had volunteered to deliver a message from her uncle to Trapper Tom, regarding some traps, and it was while on the eve of starting on this mission that Dick called at the settlement. He was then on his way to the lake himself, and so he rode on in company with Pauline.

When they reached the lake, they found Trapper Tom absent from the Castle, and, in hopes of running across him, they turned eastward and rode away.

Both had become so absorbed in the pleasures of their ride, that they failed to notice the lateness of the hour, until a savage yell smote like a death-knell upon their ears, and they beheld a score of mounted Indians bearing down upon them with the speed of the wind.

Dashing Dick raised his rifle and fired upon the advancing foe, then, turning, the two began their flight.

Pauline, brave and peerless as she was, remained perfectly calm and self-possessed, manifesting no fear whatever.

A long stretch of prairie lay before the fugitives, and over this they would be compelled to flee, all the time within plain view of the enemy. There was no chance of eluding them until they—the fugitives—had reached the timber, miles away.

The day, however, was drawing to a close, and with eager impatience did the fugitives watch the lowering sun, and at length, when he sunk to rest behind the distant plain, and twilight came on and deepened into night, they experienced some relief. But this was not long to last, for the moon, already high in the heavens, flooded the plain with its radiance.

Their hopes now centered on the forest before them. Once within its shadows, they could elude the foe, and seek shelter and safety from night and foe at Lake Castle.

This was the course suggested by Dashing Dick, as they rode onward, and it was approved by the brave girl at his side.

They conversed but little as they fled onward. Pauline never evinced so much fear as to gaze back at their pursuers. The dashing young borderman at her side, however, glanced over his shoulder, ever and anon, to note the situation. Then Pauline would search his face for some evidence of their increasing or decreasing danger. But his features were immovable. Only that same fearless, daring and silent expression rested upon them, and his voice was clear and unfaltering.

“This,” he finally remarked, “is a rather unpleasant termination of our pleasure ride, Paulie.”

“It is, indeed, Dick,” the maiden replied, with wavering voice; “are those Red Falcon’s warriors pursuing us?”

“I presume so,” he responded; “at any rate they are Sioux.”

“Then it makes no difference whether they belong to Red Falcon’s band or not. If we were to fall into their power we would soon be at the mercy of that inhuman monster, Red Falcon. But, rather than fall into their power, I will—”

“Will what, Paulie?” exclaimed Dick, wildly.

“Take my own life.”

The eyes of the fugitives met as she announced this desperate resolution. Such a light as beamed in her companion’s eyes Pauline had never seen before, and something like a chill crept over her.

“You astonish me, Pauline,” he finally said;

“remember that I love you, and the blow that

you must not think of such a desperate act. In fact, were such a thing justifiable, our present danger would not warrant it. The forest is but a few minutes’ ride distant, and once within its shadows, it will not take long to reach Lake Castle.”

“The abode of Trapper Tom and avenging spirits,” added Pauline, and a faint smile played about her pretty mouth.

“I will admit Trapper Tom and Lake Castle are a bit of a mystery to me, as well as to Red Falcon and his minions. Having been a guest at the Castle, I speak from observation—but thank fortune! here is the timber at last.”

The next moment they dashed into the woods, and as they checked their animals slightly, Pauline exclaimed:

“Dick, did you see that man standing on the margin of the thicket where we entered the woods?”

“I did not, Pauline,” he replied; “was it an Indian or white man, or could you discriminate between the two in the dark?”

“I took it to be Trapper Tom.”

“I hope it was not, Pauline, for if we go to Lake Castle we will not get in unless Tom is there.”

“I may be mistaken, but it struck me at once that it was the figure of the trapper. But hark! are the savages not gaining upon us?”

“Yes, they are like bloodhounds—hard to elude even in the darkness of the woods. But let us hope for the best.”

They rode on, without further conversation, side by side, keeping upon a high, sparsely wooded ridge which sloped gradually down to Clear Lake.

Owing to the numerous obstructions to be met with overhead and under foot, they could not ride fast, but at the same time they had the assurance that the pursuers could not make any better speed than themselves.

As they sped on in silence, Pauline noticed that Dashing Dick kept every faculty on the alert. They could still hear the pursuers behind them, and at length strange sounds to the right of them became audible. And these were answered by other sounds to the left of and before them. They were noises not belonging to the wilderness, but appeared more like preconcerted signals issuing from the throats of Indians, who were evidently trying to telegraph their location to each other.

As if to keep his fears concealed from Pauline, Dashing Dick appeared to take no notice of these ominous noises, and rode on in silence.

But Pauline had not failed to weigh their import in her own mind.

At length a small opening, or glade, was entered. Dick’s animal was now several feet ahead of the maiden’s, and when near the center of the opening it suddenly pricked up its ears and sniffed the air as if in alarm, causing its master to bend his head and listen.

He started with a low cry of alarm.

There is a rustle in the undergrowth around. There is a swift rush of feet. A hundred savage warriors come pouring from the shadows of the woods to surround the fugitives. A cry issues from their lips and thrills the quavering echoes through the lonely halls of the night.

“My God, Paulie,” cried the young hunter, “we are surrounded—we are prisoners!”

He turned his head, for no cry nor word issues from Paulie’s lips. It was then that he made a startling discovery that turned his fears to surprise. By his side stood Pauline’s horse, but it was riderless! The maid was gone, but where she had been spirited to, and by what silent and mysterious power, was something beyond the young hunter’s comprehension.

CHAPTER V.

TRAPPER TOM IN TROUBLE.

WE will now go back and follow Trapper Tom on his adventuresome trip to Clear Lake. He took his way through the woods in a course that would bring him soonest to the lake, for he felt satisfied the fugitives, Dick and Pauline, were aiming for that point. He moved quite rapidly and with less precaution than he usually observed. But his haste would not admit of much silence, and as the consequence of this, he suddenly became aware that his footsteps were being dogged by a foe bent upon mischief, or a friend in doubt as to who he was. This led him to observe greater precaution in his movements, and to select a route more difficult for an enemy to follow.

This change, however, did not divert the cunning of his “evil genius,” for his footsteps could still be heard, at times, behind and on either side.

own danger, Trapper Tom held steadily on his course. His progress was finally disputed by a small creek, which, cutting its way through a high stretch of ground to seek a level with Clear Lake, had worn a deep channel, whose embankments were high and projecting.

The creek and all its crossings were well known to Trapper Tom, and turning, he moved rapidly along its shore toward the lake. He knew where a large log spanned the deep channel, upon which he crossed almost daily, and it was to reach this point that led him in his present course.

He soon arrived at the log—an immense tree that the storm-winds had thrown across the watercourse, as Trapper Tom thought for his especial accommodation. But that it was used by other feet than his own was evident from the fact that the upper surface was worn smooth.

As was usual with him, the old borderman stopped to make sure no one was about before venturing out upon the log, for when directly over the center of the stream, he would be exposed to the full glare of the moon. He scanned the banks above and below, but saw nothing. Then he listened, but heard nothing save the sullen murmur of the water far down in the narrow, black rift. Even the stealthy footsteps of his late unknown follower could no longer be heard.

Pushing through the intervening thicket of bushes, the trapper stepped upon the log and began moving carefully along. His eyes were bent downward upon the narrow bridge, for he was compelled to pick each footstep with care.

He was half-way across, when his attention was arrested by something which he had never seen upon the log before. It was, or appeared to be, a slender vine extending from the log at his feet to the bank, in a triangular direction. He stopped to inquire into it, for even the presence of such trifling things seldom escapes the attention and inquiry of trained bordermen.

He saw that the opposite end of the vine was lost in the shadows of the shrubbery at the brink of the chasm, and so he carefully ran his eyes along the slender object, and, to his surprise, saw that it terminated in a kind of loop, which lay upon the top of the log.

He started with an inward shudder when he made this discovery, for he saw that the supposed vine was a rope made of fibrous bark, and that the circle, or the end resting on the log, was a slip-noose, and within this noose one of his feet was already squarely planted!

In an instant it flashed across his mind that the whole thing was the work of savage hands to entrap him, and the first movement suggested was that of retreat backward; but, even before he could move a muscle, his enemies, as if divining his very thoughts, sprung their cunning trap. The cord was jerked upward, and the noose encircling the ankle of the trapper, threw him off his balance, and he fell backward from the log, and the next instant he was hanging head downward over the black, roaring chasm, from the narrow bridge, over which the fatal cord became tightly and securely drawn.

Then a yell of savage triumph pealed out upon the air, and a dozen half-nude figures glided from their coverts to the edge of the chasm and gazed down upon the dangling figure of their captured foe.

Some of them crept out upon the log, and with faces aglow with fiendish triumph, began to howl forth their fierce and blood-curdling cries of vengeance.

The savages had lowered the old trapper about ten feet below the log, and then made the rope fast to it, and in this fearful position Trapper Tom hung in mid-air over the chasm, clutching wildly at space for support.

But alas! his enemies had made their calculations well, and he found himself several feet from any object that offered him the least assistance. He was, for once in his life, completely at the mercy of his foes; and the situation was a painful one.

Should the savages so desire, they could easily shoot him where he hung, or cut the rope and let him fall on the rocks below to a certain death. Nevertheless, death by either of the former ways would have been preferred by Trapper Tom to a long suspension there, for, besides all the horrors of the position, the pain itself was extremely agonizing.

He could hear the yells and jeers of those above him. He could see the forms upon the log outlined against the starry sky like colossal giants. He could see the bright moon and the dark line of forest trees that fringed either bank of the chasm, but all these were gradually

assuming unnatural proportions, for his brain was growing dizzy and his eyesight dim.

The savages seemed to know that he could not last in such a position long, and as they had no desire for his speedy death, they began making arrangements to bind him where he hung, and then to draw him up at their leisure.

So a cord was fastened around the waist of a warrior, who was then lowered from the cliff by his companions to bind Trapper Tom while he was in a position where he could offer no resistance whatever to the will of his dusky captors.

Slowly and carefully was the savage lowered into the chasm. His eyes were bent downward upon the figure of the old trapper, for even while he was in such a helpless state, his enemy felt need of approaching him with caution. His feet had nearly reached those of the old borderman, when his practiced ear caught a low purring sound coming from under the ledge at the right side of the deep, yawning chasm.

A low exclamation escaped his lips, and the sound reaching the ears of his companions, they ceased lowering him to ascertain the cause of his alarm.

The savage raised his eyes and glanced toward the dark facade of the cliff. Then another cry—a cry of terror—escaped his lips, for he discovered two dull, scintillating orbs of fire fixed upon him, and back of these he could define a dark, shaggy mass of something which his savage instinct told was a panther crouched upon a projecting ledge of rock.

Had the savage remained perfectly quiet—as he doubtless would have done had he had control of his own movements—and faced the beast, he might have awed it with a fearless gaze; but the warriors above had no sooner discovered by his actions, that he was in danger, than they began to draw him up. The first movement of his body was succeeded by a low growl, then a dark figure shot out from the side of the cliff and fastened upon the Sioux.

A shriek of terror and a fierce scream rung through the chasm as the slender cord snapped in two under this additional weight, and savage and panther went whirling upon the jagged rocks below with a dull thud and groan.

In their wild descent the feet of the savage struck the form of Trapper Tom and set it to oscillating to and fro across the chasm. The old trapper made frantic efforts to reach the side of the cliff as he swung almost within reach of it. He could touch it, but his strength was too near gone to maintain a hold upon the sharp points, but, as he swung in toward the west cliff the second time he suddenly felt himself seized by unknown hands and his return across the chasm prevented.

Was it a friend that had seized him? The thought had scarcely occurred to him, when a low voice whispered:

"Grasp the vines, old Tom, and hold on for dear life, till I get your heels below your head—there, steady!"

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

TRAPPER Tom grasped the vines that the unknown had placed in his hands, with that desperation that a drowning man grasps at the least thing which will offer him assistance. The next moment the rope that encircled his ankle was cut and his feet carefully lowered to a narrow ledge entirely concealed from the basilisk eyes above by the deep shadows of the overhanging vines and foliage.

The moment, however, that the rope swung back over the rift without its weight, a yell of baffled rage burst from the lips of the savages. This was immediately succeeded by the sound of excited voices and hurrying feet.

"Take it easy, Trapper Tom," said the unknown friend; "the red-skins will hardly get down before you can get the blood started aright and ready to flee."

"Wal, really—wal," stammered the old trapper, rubbing his eyes; "I'll sw'ar it blurred my optics more or less, stranger—it wer'n't a pleasant posish, I'll warrant ye."

"I presume not," replied the stranger, whose clear, musical voice denoted his youth.

"Now, stranger, if you'll jist lead the way, I'll follow you outen this valley and shadder. I sw'ar I've no liken for the spot, but ten to one you see'd my flyin' trapeze performance."

"To be sure I did. Fortunately I happened here a few minutes before you jumped from the log," replied the unknown, who, leading the way, soon piloted the old trapper from the gorge into the woods.

Trapper Tom now took the lead, and the two proceeded toward that point of Clear Lake

from whence the trapper desired to embark for the Castle.

It required but a few minutes' walk to bring them to the margin of the little lake.

They paused where the moonbeams fell upon them.

Trapper Tom now turned to his companion.

"Blarst my ole pictur if it ain't Harry Herbert, the boy hunter!" burst from his lips in astonishment when he recognized the face of his companion.

"Yes, Tom, and I presume you'd have recognized me ere this had your head not been turned upside down in the chasm," responded the youth.

Harry Herbert was a lad not over twenty years of age, and but for the dark, silken mustache that shaded his mouth he would have appeared much younger. He was small in stature, but well-built. His eyes were dark and beaming with a bright, jovial and fearless expression. Short, dark ringlets clustered about a fine-poised head that was covered with a mink-skin cap. In features he was handsome, although his face and hands were tanned by sun and wind to a nut-brown; and there was an air about him that told of more than the usual culture among bordermen.

Harry Herbert was represented to be cousin of Pauline Winslow, and the truthfulness of the fact was manifest in the great family resemblance between the two.

"Wal, younker," said Trapper Tom, after they had conversed for a few minutes, "you done me a good turn to-night, and—"

"Yes, I presume so, when I turned your heels below your head," interrupted Harry.

Trapper Tom indulged in a low, silent laugh.

"Edzactly, Harry, edzactly," he at length replied; "and as one good turn deserves another, suppose you turn in with me at Lake Castle and spend the night."

"I'll be only too happy to do so, if you will warrant my safety from your spirits."

"I'll do that, lad. Polly Winslow sha'n't be cheated outen her boy-lover while Trapper Tom's head's level. No, sir-ee! She's a glorious gal, and thar's scores of young fellers that'd give their very souls for her; but that's neither here nor there, so let's set sail for the Castle."

As he concluded, he proceeded to launch a canoe which he had concealed hard by. This done, they entered the craft and seated themselves, and the next moment they were gliding across the waters toward the Castle.

They were out about a hundred yards from the shore when suddenly a voice rung out over the lake with startling distinctness.

"Ho, there, Trapper Tom!" it called. "For God's sake permit me to lodge at Lake Castle to-night again."

The old borderman ceased paddling. The voice was familiar to him. It was that of Dashing Dick, the hunter.

"By the shades of purgatory!" exclaimed the trapper, "it's Dashin' Dick, and his presence recalls to my bemuddled brain the fact that I see'd him and Polly Winslow fleein' from some o' Red Falcon's savages, not three hours ago."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Harry, manifesting great surprise.

"Yes, and it may be Polly's with him now. If not, she's fallen into the power of the cursed devils."

"Then for Heaven's sake paddle back, and let us know at once where she is."

Trapper Tom headed the canoe shoreward. A few vigorous strokes of the paddle carried it to the beach where Dick was standing.

Another moment and the young hunter was aboard the craft.

"Where is Polly, Dick, where is Polly?" Tom hastened to inquire, seeing he was alone; "I see'd you and her to-night ridin' like the de'il to git away from a pack o' Ingins."

"You stood at the margin of the wood where—"

"Yes, whar you left the prairie. Where is she?"

"God only knows. She disappeared from her animal's back while we were fleeing through the woods. She rode at my side, and how and when she escaped I am unable to say, for her horse kept right on, all the time, alongside of mine. The darkness prevented my noticing her disappearance until I found myself surrounded by a pack of savages, from whom I narrowly escaped with my own life and the loss of my horse."

A sigh escaped the lips of Harry Herbert, while old Tom groaned aloud.

"What's to be done?" the latter asked.

"I know not," replied Dick, "for even now the savages are swarming through the woods in

search of me, and to tarry here will be sure death, for I know—”

He did not finish the sentence. There was a quick rush of moccasined feet. Half a dozen dusky figures glided from the shadows of the woods, rushed down into the water and seized the canoe, while at the same time a wild yell thrilled out upon the air.

“Ho, demons are upon us!” roared old Tom, springing to his feet and swinging aloft the heavy oaken paddle; “up and into ‘em, boys—lay on with a vim! Our lives depend on our nerves. Ho, thar, ye red hellion! take that, and that, and—”

His voice was drowned in the wild confusion of the battle, that now became terrible.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFLICT.

THE forest around Clear Lake became resonant with the din of the conflict. Trapper Tom, Dashing Dick and Harry Herbert on the one side and the six savages on the other.

The latter made no attempts to slay the whites. Their capture alive seemed to be the sole object of the attack.

Harry Herbert, whipping out a small revolver, opened fire with telling effect, while old Tom stood erect with his heavy paddle, which he used with great skill and success upon the tufted skulls of his adversaries.

The latter struggled hard to upset the canoe, hoping thereby to throw the whites off their guard, and while struggling with the waves, gain a bloodless victory. They were armed with short clubs, but the position of our friends and the desperate resistance they made, prevented them from inflicting any serious blows with the cudgels; and in less than two minutes from the beginning of the attack, those of the red-skins that were not killed outright beat a hasty retreat into the woods, leaving the three white men masters of the situation.

Shout after shout pealed in thunderous notes from the iron lungs of old Tom, heralding their triumph.

When he had thus given expression to his feelings, he again seated himself and put the boat in motion, heading, the second time, for Lake Castle.

“By Heaven, that was a lively bit of sport, boys!” was the first remark of Dashing Dick.

“Yes; and had the varlets not been so determined on takin’ us alive, they might have got our skulps without losin’ a man,” replied old Tom.

“You think, then,” said Harry, “that they wanted to take us alive?”

“Sartinly. I understand Red Falcon has offered a king’s ransom for myself, alive and in good condition,” replied the trapper; “and them devils at the creek to-night come party nigh gittin’ me, too—they would if it hadn’t been for you, Harry.”

“And the panther,” added the boy hunter.

“Hullo! what does that mean, Trapper Tom?” suddenly exclaimed Dashing Dick, pointing away toward the eastern shore.

All eyes were at once turned in the direction indicated, and they saw a dull red light in the timber. It was stationary, but even while pondering over its import, it began moving along the lake shore toward the north at a rapid speed, rising and falling as it went, as if borne upon a tossing wave.

Trapper Tom ceased paddling and watched it with a silent interest that denoted his intense curiosity and wonderment. Harry Herbert watched his face and that of Dashing Dick also. He saw that both were equally puzzled by the mysterious light, but he was not a little embarrassed himself when Dick turned and fixed a strange, interrogative gaze upon him.

The light continued to move on around the edge of the lake until it had reached the north side. Then it stopped, and, coming down to the water’s edge, made a few rapid oscillations and burst into a flame. A few minutes later it seemed to be moving out upon the surface of the water toward Lake Castle. This our friends discovered was really the case. It appeared to be drifting before the wind, which was blowing gently from that direction, and when it had reached a point well out upon the lake, the watchers saw that the light was attached to a canoe which contained *no occupant*, but which was being carried toward the Castle by the force of the wind.

“Devilish queer!” muttered Trapper Tom, in a tone that told he was puzzled.

“It is, indeed,” replied Dick, and he stole another glance at Harry, upon whose face he detected the shadow of smile.

“It’s my opinion it’s some signal or decoy,” declared Tom.

“Very likely, Trapper Tom,” responded Dick. “I hardly believe it, boys,” added Harry Herbert; “some of Tom’s hunter friends are endeavoring to perpetrate a joke on him.”

“Nay, nay, lad; you and Dick are all the hunters thar is in twenty miles o’ here. I tell you thar’s sumthin’ up, and I’m in fur investigatin’ the matter. The canoe will soon drift hereaways if we’d wait on it, but we can facilitate business by goin’ to meet it.”

His companions entering no protest against his course in the matter, the old trapper at once headed toward the strange craft. When within a few rods of it, and directly to the windward, Tom ceased paddling, and in a few minutes more the craft drifted within reach of his paddle. Reaching out, he drew it alongside of their boat.

The light in the boat was still burning. It was a kind of a torch, made of a bundle of dry sticks, and fastened on the thwart of the boat by means of a strip of green bark. Upon the same seat, within the uncertain glow of the torch, lay a number of sticks, which had evidently been but very recently cut. Four of these sticks were of the red willow, and among these lay a fifth one, which had been made perfectly white by peeling the bark from it.

“Thar, by the shades o’ Tophet!” exclaimed Trapper Tom, “what did I tell you, boys? Who says that that light and them sticks ain’t ‘tended for sumthin’ or other? Four red ones and one white one. Are we in danger? Are these a mute warnin’ we’re in danger o’ four red and one white enemy?”

A momentary excitement agitated the minds of the little party. Trapper Tom’s interpretation of the matter in question impressed itself upon them as being the actual fact itself. They were in danger from five enemies, four red and one white.

“But where can these five enemies be? Surely not in Lake Castle,” said Harry Herbert, giving free expression to his thoughts.

“Nay, nay, Harry,” responded Trapper Tom, “they’re not in Lake Castle, that I’ll stand good for. But it means somethin’, that’s sartin, and so here goes for the Castle.”

He tacked about and pushed for his stronghold, permitting the strange canoe to continue adrift. Two minutes’ paddling brought the trio alongside of the landing in front of the Castle door.

A landing was soon effected and the canoe tied up. Then Trapper Tom turned, and, having examined the door to see that it had not been tampered with, he proceeded to unlock and open it. This was all soon accomplished, and Tom entered the Castle, followed by Dick and Harry.

It was dark as pitch within the apartment, but Tom removed the ashes from some coals that he had covered on the hearth, and piling some dry fuel upon them, soon had a cheery fire burning.

As the ruddy light pervaded the room, old Tom glanced carefully around the apartment, to see that every thing was as he left it. Dashing Dick watched every movement of his eyes, and, when the trapper had announced every thing in order, something like an expression of relief passed over the young hunter’s face, for the secret of the torch and the sticks must have impressed him with the belief that those five enemies were in the Castle.

“Quite an impregnable fortress, Trapper Tom,” said young Herbert, glancing around the room with admiration.

“It’s a poser to the red-skins, Harry,” responded Tom; “and because they can’t take it, they go off and slander me by sayin’ the place is haunted. Bah, the red fools!”

“Boys,” said Dashing Dick, throwing himself upon a pallet of furs at one side, “I acknowledge the strength of the Castle, and my present security makes me feel like a coward when my mind reverts to the unknown fate of Pauline Winslow.”

“Tut! tut!” ejaculated Trapper Tom; “who’s here in this crowd that believes Dashin’ Dick, the hunter, to be a coward? Not ole Tom Strothers, by a long shot. Thar’s not a doubt but you are oneasy ‘bout Polly, but so’m I, and Harry, here, too,” and a mischievous smile flitted across the face of the speaker, for he knew his two guests were rivals for the hand of Miss Winslow.

Dick now gave a full account of his and Pauline’s adventures from the time they left Prairie View up to the time of their meeting by the lake, and from this Trapper Tom formed an opinion that the maiden had been captured by

the savages, and so the three resolved to set out in search of her the following morning.

This matter being settled, the master of the Castle began the preparation of something to eat, for his appetite had been somewhat sharpened by a day’s fasting and a night’s adventures.

Dick stretched himself in an attitude of repose upon the pallet, while Harry settled himself in one corner and in silence watched Tom at his work.

Dick was now afforded the first opportunity of scanning his young rival’s features and the very peculiar garb he wore. He saw that he was quite youthful in appearance, and his bronzed face bore such a striking resemblance to his cousin, Pauline, that the young hunter tried to console himself with the fancied belief that he was in her presence. But the muscular limbs, the swelling chest, the silken mustache and bronzed features of the young man would not admit of this, but impressed him—Dick—more fully with the stern fact that in Harry Herbert he had a formidable rival so far as personal looks were concerned.

Harry became conscious of the gaze fixed upon him by Dashing Dick, and, as if to avert the mesmeric power of his dark-gray eyes, he turned slightly on his seat and opened a conversation with Trapper Tom.

Presently he arose and went out onto the platform, closing the door after him.

Tom went on with his work, and when supper was at last made ready, Harry was still out. The old trapper went to the door and called him.

There was no response.

“Whar can he be?” muttered Tom, and followed by Dick, he went out to look for him.

To their surprise, they found he was nowhere about. He was gone, and the manner of his departure was enshrouded in a mystery to them, for the canoe—the only one about—in which they had come over to the Castle still lay exactly where they had left it.

Believing, however, that the young hunter would soon make his appearance, the two went back into the Castle, and seating themselves at the rude table, partook of their supper in silence.

Half an hour passed by, and Harry did not return. Dick finally came to the conclusion that he would go ashore and see if he could find some trace of the missing youth there. Tom was opposed to this, but the young hunter laughed away his objections, and going out, he sprung into the canoe moored alongside of the platform and pulled out into the lake.

Tom watched him a moment, then, closing the door, he seated himself before the fire and indulged in a train of reflections. He passed over in memory the terrible adventures through which he had passed that night, and, when he remembered by whose hand he had been rescued from a terrible death in the chasm, his spirit became aroused, and it seemed as though he, too, ought to go in search of Harry, who might then be in trouble. But this he could not do now, for Dick had taken away his only canoe. Then he wondered why Harry had gone away, and how; and why Dick manifested such great uneasiness about him. Surely, there was something singular about it all.

He at length arose, and crossin’ the room, threw himself upon his pallet of furs. Here, with his elbow resting on the couch, and his face upon his palm, he soon sunk into a kind of mental stupor.

His eyes are now fixed upon the sand-floor before him. They are possessed of that vacant light so peculiar to the eye when the mind is growing sluggish with drowsiness, or when the thoughts are far away. His facial muscles relax into an expressionless gravity.

But this inertness lasted only for a minute.

The brows of the trapper suddenly become arched. The pupils of his eyes dilate, and some great sudden emotion sends a thrill through his whole frame.

He sees a slight upheaval of the sand near the edge of his couch. He feels a slight movement under him.

“Something possessed of life is buried there under the dry sand of the Castle floor!”

But, what was it? An animal of that species burrowing in the earth? Or was it a savage foe concealed there?

Both these questions the trapper asked himself, but the latter seemed so absurd that he discarded it from his mind altogether, and rising to his feet, he was about to make some investigation as to the first, when a light rap, rap, rap on the Castle door arrested his attention.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING FACT.

THE rap on the Castle door was evidently that of some one who had no hesitance about demanding admittance, and the natural conclusion of the old trapper was, that Dick or Harry, and probably both of them, had returned.

He advanced, and opening the wicket, peered out. He saw that Harry Herbert had returned, and at once admitted him to the Castle.

"Ho, ye runaway!" exclaimed the old trapper; "whar ye been, yonker? See'd any thing o' Dashin' Dick?"

"To your first question, I will say that I have been over on the shore, trying to find out something 'bout that mysterious torch, and those five sticks. As to Dick, I have seen nothing of him since I left."

"Wal, how the deuce did you git over to the shore?"

"I found a small canoe drifted alongside of the Castle, when I went out, and in this I reached the shore."

"Did you gain any clew as to the torch and sticks?"

Harry fixed his eyes upon Trapper Tom in a manner that implied great meaning; then, leaning forward, he said, in a whisper:

"I did, Tom."

The old trapper started. A nervous jerk convulsed his whole frame, and he swept the surrounding walls with a quick glance, as though he half-suspected the youth's secret.

"What is it? what did it mean?"

"Just what was first suspected. We are in danger," replied the young hunter, in a whisper.

"Of what?"

"Enemies."

"Indeedy?"

"Yes; we are in danger of five enemies. Four of them are red-skins, and one a white-skin, as the sticks indicated."

"From whom did you learn all this, Harry?"

"From the one who sent the canoe, with the torch and sticks, adrift; from a friend of ours, who would not have dared to venture out upon the lake, but knowing we were about to run into danger, hit upon the idea of warning us by means of the torch and sticks."

"And whar are those enemies?"

In a whisper scarcely audible, the young hunter replied:

"Four of them are within this very Castle!"

Trapper Tom could scarcely conceal his emotion. His eyes involuntarily sought the ground where, but a few minutes previous, he had seen the sand move, as if by some living creature beneath it.

"They must be *there!*" whispered Harry, seeing the trapper's downward and significant glance, "for where else could they be?"

"It's impossible for four savages to be buried under the sand in this Castle," whispered Tom, "or they'd 'a' left some trace by which they'd been found out afore this. I'll admit it's a trick that none but a red-skin could play. But then, how could they have got in here? The door was securely locked when we come. No, no; I can't hardly convince myself that four savages are secreted in the ranch of ole Tom Strothers."

"I hope not, at any rate," replied Harry.

"Ay, ay, lad; for if so, a bloody fight will be the result. But be ready for the wurst, Harry. I'll fight to the death afore I give up Lake Castle."

"I will stand by you to the last, Tom," replied Harry.

"That's the music and pluck, my boy; but see here: who is that white enemy, and where is he?"

Before Harry could answer there came another sharp rapping on the Castle door, cutting short their conversation.

Tom opened the wicket and saw that Dashing Dick had made his appearance again, and so he answered his summons by opening the door and admitting him at once.

"Ah, the truant has beat me back!" he exclaimed, in a jocular tone, when he caught sight of Harry.

"Yes; he's been here some time," replied Tom, in a whisper; "but, Dick, did you make any discoveries while you were away?"

"I did," replied Dick, glancing at Herbert, who had turned away, with an expression that puzzled the old trapper to understand; "there's something wrong, Tom, and"—here his voice fell still lower—"there is a traitor dogging our footsteps."

Trapper Tom was astounded. There was something in Dick's last words, and the glance he had given Harry, that he knew at once were

to be connected. If so, Harry Herbert was the traitor. But, could such a thing be possible?

Old Tom asked himself the question a number of times, for he was loth to believe it. Then he began to reflect over Harry's past conduct of that evening. He could find nothing suspicious but his leaving the Castle without making the fact known. But Harry had told such a straightforward story about his leaving, and his discovery, that the trapper still couldn't believe he was a traitor.

Turning he went out onto the platform, motioning Dick to follow him. Harry remained in the Castle.

"Now, Dick, tell me," said Tom, "what it was you see'd while ashore?"

"The first I saw on landing," said Dick, glancing warily and uneasily about him, "was a canoe put out from shore and head directly for this point. Harry Herbert was the occupant. He had scarcely reached the Castle when another canoe glided out from the shadows of the shore, and it was headed toward this point. There were four occupants in it, and whether they were humans in disguise, or fiends in the form of beasts I cannot say."

At this juncture a curious light kindled in Trapper Tom's eyes, and a strange expression swept over his bearded features. But his head being slightly turned, Dick failed to observe the emotions his words had aroused.

"Why, how did they look, Dick? What were they?" he asked.

"They were all different," replied Dick; "that is, no two were alike. One resembled a huge black bear—the head, feet, and all were there, natural as life itself. Another resembled a mountain lion, and a fierce looking creature it was. Another resembled a panther, and the fourth one a wolf. All sat upright, the bear handling the paddle, which led me to believe they were persons disguised in the skins of those different animals. But, be that as it may, I will swear it was the most ferocious-looking crew I ever saw, and the moonbeams falling upon them lent an additional terror to their fiend-like appearance."

"Whew!" ejaculated Tom, "I should think so; but, what became of the critters?"

"There, now you are coming to the point, Trapper Tom. As I said before, those four fiends were headed directly toward this point. I kept a close watch upon their movements. They approached the Castle with great caution, and, as I supposed, they were going to make an attack upon it. They ran up to the east wall, then crept around toward the west side until the building concealed them from view. I waited for them to appear in sight again, but I waited in vain. I saw nothing of them after they put the Castle between themselves and me. I supposed they pulled out for the shore, finding the Castle impregnable and kept the building between us, and yet it seems impossible for them to have done so. However, I jumped into my canoe and pulled hard for this point, and for fear those four demons might be concealed under the shadows of the wall watching an opportunity to strike, I made the circuit of the Castle before approaching it. But not a demon did I see, Trapper Tom. They had vanished, canoe and all, as though your Castle had been a monster and swallowed them up. I will be shot if their disappearance isn't clothed in a bit of mystery to me, and I—"

Further conversation was here interrupted by a slight, unnatural noise within the Castle. The two bent their heads and listened. Something was going wrong inside, and turning they hurried into the apartment. To their horror and surprise, they found themselves on gaining the interior, face to face with four powerful savage warriors, who in the dim light of the fire on the hearth, appeared like the demons of hideousness. Behind them lay Harry Herbert bound hand and foot, with a bandage over his mouth. All around in the yielding sand were marks where a violent yet silent struggle had ensued between the young hunter and the four savages unknown to Trapper Tom and Dashing Dick.

Trapper Tom was dumfounded by the presence of the savages, and for a moment he stood like a statue of stone, his eyes fixed upon them.

But this lasted only for a moment. A look of scorn and indignation mounted his face, and his whole powerful frame became convulsed with a fury and strength that were gathering force for the coming storm.

CHAPTER IX.

OWL-FACE'S DEMAND REBUKED.

"You red scum o' the sulphur-pit," finally burst from Trapper Tom's lips as he confronted

the four savages; "what ye doin' in here, ye sneakin' red varlets?"

"Come fur scalp," was the laconic rejoinder of one of the Indians.

The four intruders were armed with tomahawks and knives, and as they drew themselves boldly up before our friends, the light of the fire burning on the hearth showed that their grim, bedaubed faces were aglow with triumph.

The holes in the sand beneath them showed where each form had been concealed, their heads having been covered under the pallet of furs hard by. Of course they had been concealed there by friends, who, having effaced every trace that might lead to detection, had taken their departure. But how these savages had effected an entrance to the Castle was beyond Trapper Tom's comprehension, and a mystery over which he had no time for conjecture now.

It was evident from the fierce aspect of their faces and the bold, defiant attitude assumed, that the savages expected to surprise and terrify our friends into quiet submission without an appeal to arms. But in this they were the surprised. If Trapper Tom experienced the least sense of fear, he permitted no look nor word to betray his emotions. On the contrary, he confronted the foe with a look that told the red-men that they had an enemy to deal with that could not be intimidated by looks or threats.

"Scalps!" sneered Trapper Tom, in reply to the savage; "do you four bloody rascallions think you can lift the ha'r o' Dashin' Dick and ole Tom Strothers? If you do, jist sail in, and ye'll git the smack-uptickin' ye ever dreamed of, ye low-lifted ground-hogs ye are, to be buried in the sand o' a gent's shanty floor."

"Ugh!" ejaculated the spokesman of the savages, "we are here to take Trapper Tom and his friends, not to fight with words."

"Oh, the deuce ye say; remember it takes good men to take us," retorted old Tom.

"White trapper all talk, no wisdom. His words are like the quills of the porcupine, always ready to meet an attack from any direction. But they will not fight, and Trapper Tom knows he cannot defeat Owl-Face and his three warriors. Already one of his friends is a prisoner, and where is the trapper's weapons to fight with?"

The last question was not wanted to apprise the old trapper that he possessed no weapon. He had laid aside his knife and pistol—having lost his rifle in the gorge—when he returned to the Castle that evening, and the instant he returned from the platform with Dick, he saw that the savages had not only made Harry a prisoner, but had made away with every available weapon that he possessed. But determined to keep up a bold appearance in spite of the threatening danger, he responded:

"Why, you red idiot, that's all the weapons I want ter knock ther greased lightnin' out o' ye," and he shook his huge bony fist almost under the chief's nose.

A malignant scowl swept over the Indian's face, and his fingers were seen to tighten upon the haft of his tomahawk. There was a deadly intent in his heart just then, but some invisible power stayed the arm that was lifting aloft a tomahawk to bring in the old trapper.

"Let Trapper Tom be careful," he at once replied, while a fierce gleam shot from his eyes; "he will have enough to account for it all when he is in the presence of Red Falcon."

"Oh, ho; so then you're goin' to tote us over to Red Falcon's ranch, eh?"

"Yes," replied Owl-Face, the savage spokesman and chief: "you will have to answer for your wrongs to the red-men before our great chief."

"Ugh, humph," responded Trapper Tom, calmly, "just so, Owl-Face; but take my word for it, when Red Falcon sits in judgment over ole Tom Strother's body, it'll be when life has departed, now mind."

A sinister smile swept over the face of the chief as he replied:

"Will the trapper and his friend not give up? or shall we fight and slay you?"

"Give up?" exclaimed Tom, derisively; "do ye take us for a couple of cowards? No, never give up!"

Owl-Face glanced at the fire that was beginning to smolder on the hearth, casting only a faint, sickly glow over the room and the grim occupants.

The four savages stood side by side, their forms casting weird and grotesque shadows on the walls behind them, and as these began to blend with the thickening darkness, the chief finally said:

"Darkness will soon fill the Castle of Trapper Tom. But a single stick is burning on the hearth. The fire will soon eat it to the heart, then it will fall into coals, crumble to ashes and die out."

"Wal, who the thunder keers? Ye needn't meddle with my affairs, ye red galoots. I'm not a fool that I don't know all what ye've told me."

"If Trapper Tom and his friends do not surrender as captives now, Owl-Face and his warriors will cut them down when the fire has eat to the heart of that stick burning on the hearth. Owl-Face has spoken. Let Trapper Tom be warned."

The old borderman saw that the Indian was in earnest, that he meant what he said. Mischief was in his heart. A fearful crisis was coming, and how were they to meet it?

A moment passed by.

A deep silence reigned within the Castle. Then there is a dull snap on the hearth. A light flares out and is immediately succeeded by total darkness. The stick on the hearth is burned in two. The moment has come.

And now may Heaven protect Trapper Tom and his friends!

CHAPTER X. STRANGE INTRUDERS.

It was a moment of terrible suspense within the Castle of Trapper Tom. All was silent as death. It was the lull in the elements that precedes the outbreak of the storm.

The muscles of the savages' arms could be seen swelling out, their naked breasts heaving with the passion of revenge, and their fingers clasped tighter their weapons, as the moment for action came.

In the midst of this calm, which was the precursor of the threatened storm, a dull light suddenly pervaded the Castle from an unexpected source. It came through the open door of the building, and was the sudden cause of drawing every eye toward it.

A shudder thrilled every savage form, and forced a cry of surprise from the lips of Dashing Dick, for they all saw a great, hairy creature resembling a bear come waddling into the room on his hind feet; and what appeared the most singular about this creature, was the fact that it carried in one paw a torch, whose light had so suddenly pervaded the apartment and checked the gathering storm, while in the other it carried a long, gleaming knife. Its movements were slow and clumsy, and shuffling across the Castle, it paused and uttered a low, sullen growl.

The attention of the savages was entirely diverted from Trapper Tom and his friends, and the momentary silence which followed the growl of the bear was almost immediately succeeded by another step at the Castle door, and turning their eyes, the two whites and their four adversaries beheld another beast enter the room on its hind feet, with a tomahawk clasped in one of his forepaws. This was the figure of a huge gray wolf. It stopped on the threshold and gave a quick, frightened look about the apartment, then hopping across the floor, it took a position near the bear, turned and uttered a series of sharp cries that caused the spectators to start.

Then came another creature into the Castle, a sight of which caused the savages to involuntarily start back. It was the figure of a mountain lion whose glowing eyeballs and white, glittering fangs were plainly revealed by the light of the flickering torch carried by the bear.

Like its grim associates, it walked erect, and in its right paw it carried an Indian tomahawk whose edge was already incrusted with blood.

When it came to a stop, it glanced warily around the room, then gave utterance to a roar that fairly shook the Castle.

A moment later a fourth animal glided into the room and stood erect by its fellows. It was a huge panther, and its scream was answered by a low growl from the bear, a sharp bark from the wolf, and a deep, sullen roar from the lion.

The astonished and perplexed savages glanced toward the door, as if expecting to see another of the grim intruders appear. But no more came.

A deep and painful silence ensued. The savages seemed rooted to the spot. The fierce, malignant scowl of vengeance that had marked their features a minute before, had changed into an expression of fear and horror. They had no doubt, however, of the four grim intruders being humans in disguise. But were they savages or whites? If the former, were they friends of Trapper Tom?

Dashing Dick recognized them as the same

creatures that he had seen push out from shore in a canoe, and disappear behind the Castle, and he watched the features of Trapper Tom, and every movement that he made, to see if any sign or look of recognition passed between him and the four strangers. But if there was any relationship, in any way, existing between them, they took good care not to betray it, and both the Sioux and the whites appeared to be in doubt as to what might be expected from the disguised intruders.

The prevailing silence, however, was finally broken by Trapper Tom, who had determined to hasten the crisis, and in a tone assumed for the occasion, he said:

"Owl-Face, you are an unwelcome guest here, and I would be pleased hugely to have you leave; so git out."

"When I go, I must take the scalp of Trapper Tom" was the cool rejoinder.

"Then you must fight to get it," replied the old trapper, emphasizing the last word by giving Owl-Face a blow with his bony fist that sent him reeling against the wall.

A savage yell broke the silence of the place. It was the signal for a general attack. The torch of the bear suddenly went out, and the apartment was wrapt in darkness. But the conflict had begun, and fearful sounds arose within the Castle.

Fierce, savage yells, shouts and execrations from the lips of old Tom, the sharp crack of a pistol, dull, crunching, rending blows, mingled with the angry growls of the bear, cries of the wolf, roars of the lion, and screams of the panther, conspired to fill the midnight air with all the horrors that the mind can conceive.

The struggle had lasted for only a moment in the Castle, when the door was forced open and the conflict transferred to the platform and the open air.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEARFUL CONFLICT.

THE battle that now raged on the platform of Lake Castle baffles description. The blows fell so thick and fast, and the positions of the combatants were changed with such rapidity that the eye could not note them all.

It was readily perceived, however, that the bear, panther, lion and wolf had taken sides with our friends, and that the Sioux were being sorely pressed—in fact, so strongly that they were compelled to act on the defensive.

Harry Herbert had been released from his bonds by one of his friends at the commencement of the conflict, and now lent a strong hand in the midst of the fray.

Dashing Dick fell unconscious under a blow in the dark, while yet in the Castle, and, as if aware of this much advantage, the Sioux made a desperate resistance, for the odds were still against them.

The first two that issued from the Castle door were Harry Herbert and one of the Sioux. Harry was being closely pressed by the savage—a powerful fellow—for whom he knew he was no match in a hand-to-hand encounter, and to avert the threatened blow, the youth kept retreating backward, in hopes that a friend would soon come to his assistance. But his friends were either too busily engaged at that moment, or else they did not see his situation, to come to his aid. Consequently he was forced back to the edge of the platform, where further retreat was impossible. The savage, seeing this, rushed upon him and shoved him over the edge of the landing, dealing him a blow as he sunk backward that rendered him totally unconscious. Fortunately, however, the canoe in which Trapper Tom had brought them over to his retreat lay alongside the platform, and Harry was saved from a watery grave by falling into the craft.

Before the savage that struck him down was enabled to follow up the advantage already gained, and complete the victory by securing the youth's scalp, he was grappled by the panther, and the two went whirling in rapid evolutions across the platform, and rolled, with a thundering splash, into the lake. Here a desperate struggle ensued; but scarcely two minutes had elapsed when the panther, thoroughly drenched, crept back upon the platform with a gleaming knife in one hand and a reeking scalp in the other.

By this time the battle had ended. Two of the Sioux lay dead upon the platform, the fourth one having made his escape. Trapper Tom and his four disguised and mysterious friends had triumphed again. The wolf, however, had been severely wounded, and Trapper Tom slightly.

The old trapper, missing Dashing Dick and

Harry Herbert, proceeded to hunt them up. He went into the Castle where the former had fallen, but he found him not. He was gone, and not one had seen him leave. Harry, too, had disappeared, and looking for him where he had fallen into the canoe unconscious, it was found that both the youth and the boat were gone.

This appeared a little singular to Trapper Tom. He could scarcely convince himself that Harry had taken the canoe and deserted him, nor that some hidden foe had spirited him away while he lay unconscious in the boat.

But leaving the old trapper to ponder over the mystery, we will follow it up and see what became of Harry Herbert.

The blow that felled the youth from the platform was from a war-club, and the force of the blow was so near spent when it struck, that it inflicted no serious wound upon the young hunter. But the force with which it fell into the canoe broke the painter of the craft and carried it out into the lake; then the wind, which was blowing from the north, drifted the boat further and further out into the lake, so that by the time the conflict had ended, it had drifted, with its unconscious burden, within the shadows that fringed the south shore.

Here for some time the canoe lay, floating to and fro at the will of the wind and waves.

Slowly Harry recovered his senses, and the first thing of which he became conscious was the gentle swaying motion of the canoe and the waves dashing against its sides. The starry sky was the first thing that he saw.

Then something like a true sense of his situation flashed in his mind. But where he was and how he had come there, was a mystery. He found, of course, that he was in a canoe upon the water, and upon extending his observations—still lying upon his back—he discovered a dark line of tree-tops sweeping athwart the clear sky.

This satisfied him that he was adrift upon the lake, and was then lying close inshore. But how had he come there? He knew nothing of his having fallen into the canoe. And where were Trapper Tom, Dashing Dick, and those four mysterious creatures that had entered Lake Castle? What had been the result of the battle?

He knew that he was not far from shore, but the dangers that might attend his attempts to land suggested measures of great caution.

So he slipped his hand and arm over the side of the boat and began paddling the craft shoreward with his open palm. His progress was very slow, and yet fast enough not to arouse suspicion as to the motive power of the canoe.

Slowly he approached the shore. The stars were at length shut out. He entered a dim twilight where the shadows of the overhanging branches shut out the light.

Every instant Harry was expecting the prow of the canoe to touch the beach. Suddenly the soft tread of a moccasined foot caught his ear.

Intuition told him it was the stealthy tread of an Indian.

Then he ceased paddling with his hand, and held his breath in dire suspense.

He hears that footstep creeping closer and closer. At times it seems to hesitate, as if in doubt; at length it pauses altogether; then Harry feels that a dusky hand has caught hold of the rim of the canoe, which he can feel is being drawn toward the shore. He feels the prow of the craft grate upon the beach and come to a stop; then he sees a dusky figure bending over him.

Harry's fears desert him; a thrill of joy shot through his whole frame, and he sprung to his feet.

"Thank God it is you, Oolocah!" burst in accents of joy from the young hunter's lips.

"Yes," replied the Princess, for she it was, "and it is well that I am here. Let me warn the hunter that dangers are growing thick around him, and the trials and hardships to endure are too many for one like you—for one so young, feeble and—"

"Sh, Oolooah!" exclaimed Harry, laying his hand upon the Princess's arm: "there is no telling what ears are about. I would not for any thing have my identity—"

"Hark!" suddenly whispered the maiden, bending her head in the attitude of listening.

Both listened intently.

Theplash of a paddle came to their ears. A canoe was approaching along the shore from the east, and was hugging the bank closely to avail itself of the advantage of the dense shadows.

Harry and the Princess remained perfectly quiet, with their ears and eyes on the alert.

They listened several moments. The canoe was still approaching; they could hear the low sound of voices which they knew to be those of Indians.

At length the dip of the paddles ceased, and from the sound of the voices, the boatmen seemed to be holding a consultation. This, however, soon ceased, and the dip of the paddles was resumed, but it was evident that the craft had changed its course. This proved to be the case, when a moment later, a long canoe crept out from the fringe of shadows into the moonlit water, and within full view of the two watchers.

It contained half a dozen painted and plumed Indian warriors, and in their midst sat Dashing Dick, the hunter.

"Look! look! fair friend!" said Oolooah, in a whisper; "is that not proof of what Oolooah has said?"

"Alas, it is, Oolooah!" replied the young hunter.

"Then the Great Spirit will see that Oolooah's lover is no longer an exile from his people because Red Falcon stands in his place," replied the Princess, in a tone that told of the strengthening of some vague hope in her young breast.

"Live in hope, Oolooah, dear friend," replied her companion; "a just retribution shall soon be visited upon the head of that hydra-headed fiend, Red Falcon."

"The words of the young hunter sink deep into Oolooah's heart; they will never be lost," and Oolooah took the youth's hand and kissed it with impulsive devotion.

"Oh, that all hearts were like yours, fair maid of the forest," exclaimed Harry.

"Our people would never be at war then," she replied; "and when Red Falcon is dead, and Elk Horn, Oolooah's lover is chief, then peace will come between our people."

"I hope that day may soon come, Oolooah, for your sake and that of the settlers."

Oolooah's heart beat wildly with joy.

"But, Oolooah," continued Harry, "we must not linger here longer."

"No; dangers are abroad. But where will the hunter go?"

"To Prairie View."

"May the Great Spirit go with, and keep watch over you."

"God bless you, Oolooah; good-night."

They parted.

Harry turned his face southward, while Oolooah moved slowly away toward the village of Red Falcon, which was situated some three leagues to the north-eastward of Clear Lake.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO CAPTIVES.

ON the day following the night of the events just narrated, a man was chopping in the forest about two miles north of Prairie View. He was a man a little past middle life, but a perfect type of the hardy pioneer.

His sleeves were rolled up, displaying his great brown arms and their muscles, which rose and fell like miniature waves with each sway of the ax. His head was bare and his collar open, and as the flashing ax rose and fell, sinking deeper and deeper into the great log upon which he stood, it was plain to be seen that it was wielded by a powerful and skillful man.

This man was Ishmael Haven, the uncle of Pauline Winslow, and with whom the latter had made her home since the death of her parents. He was chopping on an immense basswood log, which had been felled several days previous. It was hollow, and Haven was dividing it into cuts of ten feet each, to be split and made into feed-troughs for cattle and horses.

One cut had already been severed, and the woodman had just commenced on the second, when we introduce him to the reader.

A few vigorous strokes of the ax sent the keen blade through the shell, and at that instant Ishmael Haven ceased chopping. There was a strange sound within the log, and seemed to have been made by some living creature. The woodman dropped the blade of the ax to the log and leaned slightly upon the handle, gazing down at his feet as he did so. A cry arose to his lips, for he saw that the hitherto bright edge of his ax was dimmed—that it was stained with fresh blood!

Quickly the old woodman sprung from the log and prepared to meet the worst, no difference in what form it came. He could hear something, either human or beast, scrambling from the log in great confusion.

Presently a huge bear made its appearance therefrom, a deep wound in its shoulder.

Stung to fury by its wound, the bear turned upon our friend the instant it saw him.

Ishmael Haven was a brave and reckless man; he did not retreat, as prudence dictated, but awaited the bear's approach; then he raised aloft his ax to brain the beast, but, just then, the latter reared upon its haunches, and with one blow of its paw knocked the woodman down. Almost at the same moment the report of a rifle rung sharply through the woods, and the bear rolled to the earth a lifeless, quivering mass.

Ishmael Haven sprung to his feet and seized his ax excitedly.

"Take it cool, Ishmael; it's all over with now."

The woodman turned. Dashing Dick, the hunter, stood before him, the smoke still curling from the muzzle of his rifle.

"Ho, it is you, Dick? Good-morning, boy!" said Haven, extending his hand; "a de'il of a lucky shot, and just in time, too."

"I judge so," replied Dick, shaking the proffered hand; "that old bear was a good boxer, Ishmael."

"Yes; I can bear witness to that; but, what's the news, Dick?"

"Red Falcon is carrying on the devil, as usual. We had an awful time at the lake, last night; but, Mr. Haven, has—has Pauline returned home?"

"From where?"

"Yesterday's ride."

"Why, certainly. Why do you ask?"

"Did she not tell of our troubles with the Indians?"

"She told me nothing."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word."

Dick seemed surprised, and for a moment he looked at Haven as though he doubted his word.

"Why, what do you mean, Dick?" Haven continued; "didn't you know that Pauline came home?"

"I did not. When we reached Clear Lake we found Trapper Tom gone, and concluded to ride some distance east in hopes of meeting him. But instead of meeting the trapper, we were met by a band of savages, when a race for life began. We held our own in the race, and finally reached the woods. Here we had every hope of escaping, but in our flight through the darkness, Pauline disappeared all of a sudden from her horse's back. What became of her I knew not. I was pursued by the savages to Lake Castle, where I found safety, and this morning I set out for your place to find out whether Pauline had returned home or not."

"This is indeed news to me, Dick. Pauline was in her room this morning when breakfast was announced. I supposed she had returned shortly after nightfall, and being tired and weary, had gone directly to her own room, which she can enter by way of an outer door without our knowing it. I spoke about her looking so pale and troubled, at the breakfast table, but she only laughed at me, and said never a word about her adventures, more than to tell me that she did not deliver my message to Trapper Tom, for the reason that he was not at home. Poor Paulie! since the death of her parents she seems another girl. I'm afraid her heart is breaking little by little. She tells us but little of her sorrow, and seldom of her adventures. Her aunt Judith thinks she has imposed an oath upon herself to take the life of Red Falcon. But then she, poor thing, might as well try to catch Satan as Red Falcon, for if Trapper Tom can't catch him, no one else on earth can. But, Pauline will be out here pretty soon. She is coming to bring my dinner. Can't you wait?"

"No; I will have to move on; I'm on my way below," replied Dick.

The two talked on a few minutes longer, then Dick took his departure, going in a direction that would enable him to intercept Pauline while coming to the woods with her uncle's dinner.

In this he was successful. He had not traveled over a mile when he met the maiden carrying a small willow basket on one arm and her rifle on the other.

She was dressed as usual, in that peculiar frock of fine buckskin, scarlet cap and moccasins, all of which resembled the outfit worn by the Indian Princess, Oolooah, but were made with more taste and neatness.

Her eyes were heavy and languid, and her face as pale as though she had suffered a long spell of illness.

She started at sight of Dick, and a faint tinge of red came to her cheeks as she stammered a "good-morning."

"Thank God that I meet you alive and well, Pauline!" exclaimed Dick: "but your face tells me you have suffered since I saw you last, and now then, Pauline, tell me how and why you left me without notice in the woods last night."

"I was thrown from my horse's back," replied Pauline, "by a limb striking me on the head. See there."

She raised her cap and showed him a purple spot on her forehead.

"It was a cruel blow, Pauline," he said.

Something like sarcasm tinged her voice as she continued:

"I did not cry out, for the Indians were close upon us, and I knew to have you turn back would be to bring you into danger, so I sprung to my feet and concealed myself. When the Indians passed on by me, I hastened on foot to Prairie View."

"You are a brave and fearless girl, Paulie, and while I am unable to claim a fulfillment of your promise of a week ago, I still live in hopes of securing Red Falcon's scalp."

"I pray you will, Dick, but why haven't you been here to see about me before now?" she asked, a little petulantly.

"I was pursued by the Indians and compelled to seek refuge in Lake Castle, along with Trapper Tom and your cousin, Harry Herbert. During the night we were attacked by four savages, who lay concealed within the Castle, and a desperate conflict ensued. We gained the victory, but when the battle had ended, we found that Harry was missing."

Pauline started, and her face grew still whiter.

"Was he slain?" she asked.

"I can not say, Pauline. Harry acted a little strange before the fight, and there were subsequent developments sufficient to lead Trapper Tom to mistrust him being in league with the Indians. We searched for him after the conflict was over but found no trace of him. A canoe was also missing."

"Who searched for him?" asked Pauline, laying a stress upon her voice, that seemed freighted with a double meaning.

"I, for one, searched for Harry until I fell into the power of a pack of Indians, who took me into their canoe and resumed, or at least seemed to continue, the search I had begun. Why this was I could not understand, but I managed to effect my liberation from the savages, and made my way toward Prairie View to ascertain what had been your fate, Paulie."

"Then you still know nothing of Harry?"

"No. Trapper Tom, however, is in search of him. The footprints of a woman were found on the beach, north of Lake Castle, this morning. From all appearances it is the tracks of an Indian woman, and, if so, it is very probable that they are those of the Princess Oolooah. These, with other tracks, unmistakably those of a white person, and about the size of Harry's, were found together at another point, and all this has led to the belief that she met him last night on the shore and imparted to him some information concerning the intended attack on Lake Castle."

Pauline appeared deeply impressed by these revelations, and at times a mingled expression of disgust and sadness would sweep over her face.

"There is something wrong, Dick," she at length replied, fixing her dark eyes upon his, with an unfathomable light shining from their depths. "I had a dream last night, which impressed me strangely. I dreamed that I stood upon the banks of a little lake with a friend, watching the tiny waves chase each other over the glossy bosom of the water, and listening to the weird music of the wind in the treetops overhead. Suddenly a canoe crept out from the shadows of a distant shore, and, sweeping across the lake, began coasting along near where we stood. In that canoe were seated six fierce-looking savages, and in their midst was a white man, who we thought at first was a prisoner, but, when we saw and heard him directing the movements of the Indians, we knew he was their friend. We were greatly surprised, for that white man was the pretended friend of the people of his own race, and one who would never be suspected of complicity with the Indian. But, then, it was all a dream, and dreams they say go by contraries."

Dashing Dick manifested no little surprise during this revelation, but when she concluded he burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"I am glad, Paulie, that you put no faith in dreams," he finally remarked, "for they are woeful enemies to the peace of the dreamer."

"But, when the dreamer dreams with eyes wide open and mind clear, what then?"

"In that case he will need no astrologer to interpret his dream."

"Mine was such a dream, and yet I want an astrologer to interpret it. Perhaps you can do it. You know who the white man was in that canoe that was coasting along the south side of Clear Lake last night."

"Why should I know it, Paulie?"

"Why should you?" the maiden retorted, her eyes flashing with indignation. "For the reason that you are a base liar, a traitor, a fiend in human shape; you are—"

Before she could finish the sentence the bushes before them were parted in a dozen different places, and the painted face and plumed head of an Indian warrior appeared in each opening.

A cry arose to Pauline's lips. This was followed by a thrashing through the undergrowth, the swift rush of feet, a wild, savage yell, and the next moment, when she was a helpless captive, and saw Dashing Dick beaten to the earth and bound, she had cause to regret the bitter, cruel accusation she had just pronounced against him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FRESH TRAIL.

ISHMAEL HAVEN worked away after the departure of Dashing Dick, the sweat rolling in great drops from his brow and his whole form heated with exertion.

Being a brother to Pauline's mother, his sympathies for the orphan maid were deep, for he was naturally a great, kind-hearted man. He and his good wife, Judith, did all in their power to console Pauline and lighten her burden of grief. But, for all this, she was still sad at heart, and appeared to be fostering some great, secret resolution in her heart.

Her friends knew, or at least believed, that she loved one person outside of her family relations. That was Captain Charles Temple, who was then stationed at Fort D—, a number of miles to the south of Prairie View. And Ishmael had nevertheless heard others speak of Harry Herbert as being a suitor for her hand; but, singular as it appeared, his name had never been mentioned in the Haven family by Pauline. She claimed to others, however, that Harry was her cousin, and those who had seen him could not dispute the assertion, for the reason that he bore a striking resemblance to Pauline. But, why had he never come to Prairie View? And why had Pauline never mentioned his name in the family?"

Ishmael asked himself these questions as he worked away, but he could settle on nothing satisfactorily in regard to the matter. He could not help but think that Pauline was manifesting some impropriety in her strange conduct of meeting Harry clandestinely in the forest, for all he knew her character was spotless. And yet she permitted Dashing Dick to call to see her quite frequently, and Captain Temple occasionally. She surely could not love them all, and Ishmael knew she was not a flirt. So, then, what could she mean?

The old woodman revolved the matter in his mind, picking up a link here and a link there, which he put together, and then found that he had quite a chain of circumstantial evidence pointing strongly at certain facts which he had slightly entertained before.

He became so impressed with the facts that he ceased working and sat down upon the log to reflect still further on the subject. While thus engaged, he was suddenly startled by fierce, savage yells in the direction of the settlement.

Springing to his feet with a muttered exclamation, he took up his rifle and set off at a rapid pace through the woods.

He reached the settlement, but found no trace of the savages. He even found the settlers in ignorance of the cause that had aroused his fears.

It was then that he learned that Pauline had left the settlement nearly an hour before to carry his dinner to him. He also learned that Dashing Dick had not been at the settlement.

Then in an instant the truth flashed across his mind. The young hunter and Pauline had met while the latter was coming to the woods, and both had been captured by lurking red-skins.

Ishmael Haven and his wife became almost frantic over the unknown fate of Pauline. The news spread like wildfire throughout the village, and in a few minutes the men came thronging into Ishmael's cabin, rifle in hand, ready to go in pursuit of the savages, while the women ran from house to house, white with fear, and eager for the details of the maiden's capture.

Ishmael selected half a dozen young men to

accompany him from the assembled crowd. All would have gone with him quite willingly, but in such a case the village would have been left unprotected.

In a few minutes the seven pursuers were ready, and at once took their departure. They journeyed on foot in order to follow the trail of the savages, if it could be found.

None of them were experienced Indian trailers, and they had no sooner struck the trail of the foe than they felt greatly the need of some experience in the matter. However, they pushed on rapidly as possible, and they had just emerged from the forest when a voice hailed them.

All recognized it at once, and a cry of joy escaped each lip.

It was the voice of Trapper Tom.

"Wal, now, friends," he said, as he emerged from the woods and approached them, "what is the meanin' o' all the warlike appearance up hereaways?"

"The de'il's to pay, Trapper Tom," replied Ishmael Haven. "Pauline Winslow an' Dashin' Dick are captives in the power of a band of Indians that we are now following."

"Ther nation ye say?" exclaimed Tom, with a tinge of sadness in his voice; "Polly Winslow a captive?"

"Yes—captured about noon."

"Poor girl; the trouble she has suffered, and all on account of that devil, Red Falcon! I tell ye, men, I'd give five years o' my life fur one shot, at fifty paces, at that chief's heart. But a day o' reckonin' is drawin' nigh fur that cuss, boys; if Polly's rescued alive, I have a secret plan by which I can slide Red Falcon's scalp from his head to my girdle, and I'll do it, too."

"Hurrah for you, Trapper Tom," shouted Ishmael Haven, "and may Heaven give you strength to execute your plan and forever rid Prairie View of the curse that hovers around it."

"Ay! ay!" added his companions.

"Wal, friends," said the old trapper, "let's git to business. This 'ere trail, I see, is not more than two hours old; still thar'll be little chance o' overtakin' the reds this side o' their village. If Polly gives out, they'll find some way to git her along. They may not try to git to the village to-day, and if so, we may over-haul 'em to-night. That'll be our best chance."

"They may stop to torture Dick," said Haven.

"Devil the bit o' it, Ishmael Haven, and the sooner we're off the better it'll be for us and poor Polly."

"To you, then, I resign the lead, Trapper Tom."

Without further words the old trapper took up the trail, and the next minute they were moving across the plain.

They followed the trail nearly an hour, when Haven said:

"Isn't this trail leading us southward, Trapper Tom, a little too much to bring us to the Sioux village?"

"It leans considerably to'r'd the lower-ken-try," replied the trapper; "but then, none of them Pottawatomies have ventured up this side fur—no, it's a pack o' Sioux that's got Polly, and this southward bend in their flight is only to mislead us. Ten to one we're follerin' the trail of the main body of varlets, while probably two or three others have taken the prisoners and the nigh cut to the village. And my plan now is to leave this trail and strike a bee-line nor'-east. We will gain all o' two miles by it, and maybe run across the red knaves. I know their tricks too well, Ishmael, to be led away by them; so let's drop the trail here and move on this way."

Suiting the action to the word, he turned slightly to the left and led the way across the plain.

They were enabled to move more rapidly now, for no time was lost in watching for a trail, and by sunset they had reached the first of a series or chain of small groves, which, traveling eastward, grew more numerous and larger until they finally terminated in a large tract of timber bordering a river.

Our friends had just reached the first of these prairie islands, when an exclamation from Trapper Tom startled his companions.

"What now, Tom?" asked Ishmael Haven.

"Look at that grove yander, half a mile to the east'ard, and tell me if you can see any thing that indicates life bein' within it?"

His companions looked as directed, and answered in the negative.

"That then goes to prove that the eye of the hunter is keener than the commonality of men."

"Yes; I will admit that the eyes can be

trained as well as the mind, and that the hunter looks for signs of life and danger in things that we settlers never think of."

"Wal, now," replied Tom, flattered by this concession, "if you look sharp, you can see a thin column of smoke risin' from the heart of that grove."

"Oh, yes, I can see it now that you have pointed it out," replied Haven; "but what does it indicate, Tom?"

"That thar's fire in the grove—always fire whar thar's smoke."

"Do you think our Indians are encamped there?"

"It may be possible; but I hardly think the red-skins would be so thoughtless—unless some trick's intended—as to publish their whereabouts in that way. True, it may be some trap for us, but Trapper Tom's not the rat to bite at every bait."

"Well, what's to be done?" questioned Ishmael, growing sorely impatient.

"What's to be done? Why, lay right here till dark, then I'll go over and reconnoiter that grove, and see what it contains. Thar's some one thar, either red or white, and we must know which before we proceed further, for it'll never do to let a pack o' red knaves git onto our trail. We'll not have long to wait, for it's nearly night now, you see. And let me tell you, boys, that if it's the red-skins that kaptered Pauline Winslow and Dashin' Dick, I'll reveal a secret to you that will shock Prairie View to the very center."

Wondering what the old trapper's great secret could possibly be, the settlers sat down to rest, and to await the coming of darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRAGOON CAPTAIN.

NIGHT soon fell over the little grove in which our friends were waiting. The moon was not up, and through the first darkness that succeeded twilight the eyes of the watchers saw the faint twinkle of a camp-fire in the grove to the east of them.

"It's singular who it is in that grove," said Trapper Tom; "it can't be Ingins, for they wouldn't be so bold with their fire. At least, if it is reds, they're tryin' to trap us, or else have departed widely from their usual habits of precaution. But what's the use o' spendin' all this breath in conjectures? I'm goin' to see 'bout it, boys. If I find it is friends, I will fire my gun, and you 'uns can come over; but if it's Ingins, I'll come back and report, if I don't git my hair yanked off."

"All right, Tom, all right."

The old trapper at once took his departure. He moved with dispatch, and ere he was scarcely aware of it, so eager was he to find out who was in the grove, he was in the outskirts of the motte.

He paused and listened.

The neigh of a horse came to his ears, and from this he felt satisfied that the Indians they were in pursuit of were not in the grove.

However, he determined not to go back until he knew the facts of the case, and so, with his rifle at a trail, he began moving stealthily toward the camp, guided by the twinkling fire.

He had gone but a short way when he was suddenly brought to a halt by the tread of a sentinel's foot, and the next instant a stern voice demanded in plain English:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Trapper Tom," replied our old hero.

"Advance, Trapper Tom, and give an account of yourself," responded the sentinel.

"Wal, sir, I'm Trapper Tom, or if you like it in other words, I'm Thomas Strothers, esquire, of Lake Castle, at your service," said the trapper, stepping boldly out and confronting the sentinel, who, he was now enabled to see, wore the uniform of the United States dragoons.

The old trapper was about to continue his "account of himself," when the sentinel interrupted him, saying:

"I guess you may make your detailed report to Captain Temple."

"Captain Temple!" exclaimed Tom. "Do you mean to say Captain Charley Temple is about?"

"Yes, in camp yonder. Follow your nose to that fire you see there, and you will meet the captain."

"Just so," replied Tom, and he proceeded to follow the sentinel's directions.

The next minute he found himself in the midst of two score men in uniform, seated around a huge camp-fire, smoking and chatting.

In the background were hitched a number of horses, with the bits in their mouths, and the

saddles upon their backs, which told that their halt was not for the night.

Trapper Tom was well known to most of the soldiers, and his presence there was greeted with a shout of welcome.

Then the leader of the party, a young man of some five-and-twenty years, with a fine, commanding form, a bold, pleasant eye, and handsome features, advanced, and, taking the old trapper by the hand, said:

"Of all other persons, Trapper Tom, you are the one I most desire to see on the present occasion."

"Nay, nay, captain," replied Tom, "I'll gainsay that. I know thar is another you'd ruther meet than ole Tom Strothers."

Captain Temple blushed slightly, for he well knew to whom jolly-hearted old Tom referred.

"It's second nature to you, Tom, to be contrary for the sake of argument, so I will not dispute you."

"Wal, then, what ye doin' up this way, captain?"

"We are on our return to the fort, from the pursuit of a band of horse-thieves that stole some of the lower settlers' stock and ran it off up this way."

"Wal, it's a God-send they did," replied Tom.

"Why so, Tom? Are not things all going right up this way?"

"Not by a long shot, Charley," replied the old trapper, plucking him aside. "I've got a bit of bad news for your ears."

"What is it, Tom? Don't keep a fellow on nettles."

"Polly Winslow is a captive in Red Falcon's power."

Captain Temple groaned aloud.

"When did the wretch capture her?" he asked at length.

"Bout noon to-day. Dashing Dick, the hunter, it is supposed, was captured at the same time. When I see'd your camp-fire, I thought it might be the reds, and so left the boys and come down to reconnoiter."

"Then you are not alone?"

"No; Ishmael Haven and six of the Prairie Viewers are in the grove west o' here."

"Do you think there are any hopes of overhauling the foe to-night?"

"Not a bit o' it, captain. They're too sharp to be caught, and I'll tell you my reason."

"Well?"

Trapper Tom, in a low tone revealed to the young captain a secret that forced an involuntary oath from his lips.

"Call your men over, Tom," Temple said, "and we will move on the Indian village at once. We had decided to resume our journey at midnight, but will not tarry longer. Every moment gained may save Pauline a pang of heart-suffering."

"That's all so, captain," replied Tom; then he proceeded to the edge of the grove and fired his rifle, as he had arranged to do in case he found friends in the grove.

Ishmael Haven and his companions heard the report and proceeded at once to join those in the grove.

In a few minutes more the dragoons were all mounted and moving northward, guided by Trapper Tom and his companions.

CHAPTER XV.

FACE TO FACE WITH RED FALCON.

AFTER Dashing Dick and Pauline had been made captives and both securely bound, the former was taken in charge by three of the savages and conducted away in a direction almost opposite to that taken by Pauline's captors.

The maid was taken to where three horses, with muffled hoofs, were hitched. She was mounted upon the back of one of them, then two of the Indians sprung upon the others. Placing her between them, the savages rode away toward the Indian village, leaving the rest of the party to cover their flight from pursuers.

Long before nightfall Pauline and her two grim captors reached the Indian village, and as they rode through the town, the captive caught sight of Ooloah, the Princess, who gave her a glance, accompanied with a slight motion, which signified a recognition of our heroine's situation. From this Pauline took courage.

She was taken to a lodge near the center of the village and there compelled to dismount. Then she was ushered into the tent, which seemed to have been prepared for her, and a guard stationed at the door.

Pauline did not give up on finding herself a captive in the heart of Red Falcon's village.

She seated herself and became at once resigned to her fate. She had already calculated her chances of freedom from the recognition of Ooloah, and so she nerved herself for the worst.

Nearly an hour had passed away when her thoughts were suddenly broken in upon by the entrance of the Princess herself.

"Oh, Ooloah!" the captive exclaimed, rising to her feet, and grasping Ooloah's hand; "of all persons you are the most welcome."

"I am glad to be here, fair sister, for I know your trials are great," replied Ooloah, stooping and kissing the maiden's hand.

"Even in the lion's den, Ooloah, I have hopes of—"

The Princess placed the tips of her fingers on Pauline's lips and whispered:

"Do not speak your thoughts aloud. The ears of the guard at the door are keen, and he may thwart all your hopes."

"True, true, Ooloah," she replied softly; "but, tell me, is Red Falcon about?"

"He is. He came but a short time ago. He will visit you soon."

A sigh escaped Pauline's lips.

"Be of good heart, white sister," replied the gentle Ooloah, kindly, "and besides offering you my sympathy, I have come to warn you to pretend ignorance of all that I have revealed to you; I ask this, not only for my sake, but your own."

"I will endeavor to observe your warning," replied Pauline; "and if I am to stay here long, I hope you will visit me often."

"I will come whenever I can. I will see my brother and plan some way for your release if such a thing is possible. Red Falcon shall never make you his slave, sister. There are those watching him who will not hesitate to strike in the dark when forced to, and when Red Falcon is gone, then will Ooloah's lover, Elk Horn, be chief of the tribe. Good-by, fair sister."

As the last word fell from her lips, Ooloah glided from the lodge.

Ten minutes later, Red Falcon, the Scourge of the Prairie, entered Pauline's prison lodge.

The captive manifested no fear whatever, but rather regarded him with a look of unutterable disdain.

The chief was a tall, powerful-looking fellow in the prime of life. He was loaded with weapons and barbaric finery, and painted and plumed in a wild, fantastic manner. He might, under other circumstances, have been called a handsome chief. But this he was not entitled to, for in an Indian, the heart of a man must correspond with exterior appearance to appear prepossessing.

The chief fixed his eyes upon Pauline as he entered, as if expecting to see her start with fear and her whole frame tremble with terror at sight of his mighty and august person; and he was not a little disappointed when he saw that she scarcely deigned to notice his arrival.

"Let the white maiden look up," he said, in good English. "Red Falcon stands in her presence."

"I am fully aware of the fact," Pauline replied; "I have looked upon the face of Red Falcon before."

"When—where? Let the white maiden speak out."

"The night he destroyed my home and murdered my friends," she replied.

A grim smile lit up the face of the chief.

"Then you recognize my power, also?" he said.

"I recognize more fully your fiendishness of heart."

A cloud of disappointment swept over Red Falcon's face. He saw there was but little chance of compromising with his captive, and so he would have to resort to his power to bend her defiant will.

"Let the white maiden beware!" he said; "she shall feel my power for what she has said."

"Then you threaten me—you, a boasting chief, threaten a weak, helpless girl, who is already in your power!"

The retort seemed to cut deep into the chief's cowardly heart.

"Red Falcon cares nothing for the maiden's words," he replied; "and he fears them as little as he fears the white maiden's lovers, whom she has employed to take Red Falcon's scalp."

He had expected the assertion to startle the captive, and he was not a little surprised, as well as disappointed, to see that she manifested no unusual emotions.

After some further words, he gave up his first

attempt to break her resolute spirit, and left the lodge.

By this time it was sunset, and the shadows of night soon began to gather in the maiden's prison lodge, and a corresponding gloom began to settle over her heart.

But these were suddenly dispelled by the appearance of Ooloah with a lamp made of fat in a stone bowl. She also brought Pauline some food.

"I have brought my white sister a light and some food," Ooloah said; "let her eat, for it will give her the strength she may need before morning," and the Princess fixed a meaning glance upon the maiden.

There was a kind of mutual and sympathetic system of telegraphy existing between the two girls, which enabled Pauline to comprehend the meaning of Ooloah's words and looks, and sent a hopeful gleam into her eyes. She ate the meats and fruit brought to her, and this nourishment added greatly to her strength of both body and mind.

When she had finished the supper, Ooloah moved close to her, and said, in a whisper:

"I have had a long talk with my brother and two of his friends, and toward morning an attempt will be made to effect your release."

"But the guard will give the alarm," said Pauline.

"A warrior who will favor my plans will stand over your tent after midnight."

A cry of joy rose to Pauline's lips, but forcing it back, she replied:

"Oh, my dear red sister! you are a noble girl, and I sincerely hope you will gain the reward justly due you."

"If my lover, Elk Horn, and his young chiefs are reinstated in the position that belongs to them, then will I have won my reward. But this can never be while Red Falcon exerts his subtle influence over my tribe."

"Then your lover is not in the village?"

"No; nor has he been for two years. He and three of his young war-chiefs were forced to flee, to save their lives, for alleged conspiracy against Red Falcon, the impostor."

"Do you know where Elk Horn, your lover, is?"

"I do. I have seen him often—but two moons ago. But I must not remain here longer. Can you appear, at any time, sister, as I last saw you when we met by the side of the lake?"

"In a minute's time I can, Ooloah."

"Then do so, within an hour from now. A warrior, with a white feather in his scalp-lock, will enter your lodge from the rear when the moon stands above the tree-tops. He will conduct you to the forest, where I will meet you."

"I will be prepared to go, Ooloah."

Ooloah left the prison-lodge and proceeded to that of her brother, who was already preparing to liberate and escort Pauline from the village.

Scarcely an hour after Ooloah's departure from Pauline's tent, Red Falcon again stalked into the captive's lodge.

A cry of baffled rage burst from his lips as he did so.

Pauline was gone, but there before him stood Harry Herbert, the young hunter, with a pistol leveled full at his heart!

"Not a word, Red Falcon, or, by the God that made me, I will shoot you dead!" the young hunter said, in a low voice, yet in a tone that was full of deadly meaning.

Red Falcon was horror-stricken. He was a coward at heart, and the sight of that dark tube pointing, like the finger of doom, at his heart, sent a chill of terror through his whole frame.

The nervous twitching about the corners of his mouth betrayed the perturbation that he endeavored to conceal. He scanned the face of the daring youth before him, and, when their eyes met, the baffled chief detected a fire in his antagonist's eyes that suddenly threw a strong light upon a certain act which, to that moment, had been a mystery to him.

He saw that the silken mustache of young Herbert was false. He saw that his russet-brown color was not his own. He saw that Harry Herbert was Pauline Winslow!

"Ah!" he at length found breath to exclaim, "you think you can deceive me, Pauline Winslow, but you can not. Your disguise has been a deep one, I will admit, but it will avail you nothing now."

"It surprises me, great Red Falcon," Pauline replied, for she it was in the disguise in which we have known Harry Herbert heretofore; "nay, it is singular that you have not penetrated my disguise before."

"I have suspected the fact, my dear, but it will all be the same now," he continued, expecting to catch her off her guard and dash the pistol from her hand. "I have suspected the fact more than once, and I will tell you when. The night—"

He did not finish the sentence. A dusky hand was suddenly thrust through a rent in the lodge behind him. A club was clutched in that hand, and with this Red Falcon received a blow on the head that felled him unconscious to the earth.

Then the slit in the lodge was enlarged, and the lithe figure of an Indian warrior glided into the apartment. A white feather was in his hair. It was Oolooah's brother. On his arm he carried a blanket, which he quickly threw, hood-like, over Pauline's head and shoulders, then motioned her to follow him.

She did so, and the next instant they were threading the streets of the village, for there was nothing suspicious about them. Parties of warriors were coming and going frequently during the night.

Suddenly a savage yell wailed out upon the air. The situation of Red Falcon and the escape of the prisoner had no doubt been discovered.

From lodge to lodge ran the cry of alarm until the whole village was astir.

Pauline and her red conductor quickened their footsteps. They passed the guards and were joined at the appointed place by Oolooah. Then the warrior turned back and mingled with the excited crowd.

Pauline and Oolooah continued on, deeper and deeper into the intricate mazes of the woods.

"Where shall we flee to, Oolooah?" Pauline finally asked.

"To Lake Castle. It's a long walk, but our nearest one to safety! Hark! they are upon our trail. Run, sister, run!"

"Pauline! Pauline!"

The call came from a clump of undergrowth. Pauline recognized it and stopped.

Two figures emerged from the thicket and approached the fugitives.

They were Trapper Tom and Captain Temple.

"Oh, thank God it is you, Charley!" burst from Pauline's lips.

"Yes, dear," replied the young man, folding his sweetheart to his throbbing heart.

There was a momentary silence, which was broken by Trapper Tom saying:

"Come, come, younker, that's no time to be sweet now. The varlets are arter the gals like so many bloodhounds."

Captain Temple drew the arm of his affianced within his own, and hurried away after Tom and Oolooah.

CHAPTER XVI.

RED FALCON, EXIT!

ONCE more the thread of our story leads us back to Clear Lake and the Castle of Trapper Tom.

The night was far spent when voices might have been heard issuing from the forest skirting the eastern shore of the lake. They were savage voices, rendered wild with excitement.

As the moments wore on a canoe suddenly shot out from the shadows of the bank and headed toward Lake Castle. It contained four persons. They were Trapper Tom, Captain Temple, his betrothed, Pauline Winslow, and Oolooah, the Princess.

In their endeavors to join the dragoons with Pauline and Oolooah, Captain Temple and Trapper Tom had been cut off from the point where the soldiers were in waiting by a band of savages. Then they were compelled to turn their faces toward Clear Lake for safety, and there they were pursued by a party of the foe. Fortunately, however, they reached the lake and effected a safe embarkation for the Castle. But they were not a minute too soon, for scarcely were they a hundred yards from shore when they saw a canoe, loaded to its utmost capacity, put out from shore in swift pursuit. In their midst was Red Falcon.

"Pull, Tom, pull for our lives!" exclaimed Captain Temple; "the red demons are after us, with a vengeance, too."

"Let 'em come, captain," responded old Tom; "once under the guns of Lake Castle, all the hosts of Red Falcon couldn't git us."

The chase was a spirited one, but it lasted only for a few minutes. The platform of the Castle was reached, a safe landing effected, and the fugitives admitted within the famed defense of Trapper Tom. But, scarcely had the door been closed and barred, when Red Falcon and his warriors reached the platform.

To the surprise of Captain Temple, who had

heard such wonderful stories of Lake Castle, he saw a cheery fire burning on the hearth when they entered, and the room was lit up with its glow. But who had kindled that fire? There was no one about, and yet it had been quite recently made.

The captain had no time for inquiry or mental speculation now. Red Falcon and his warriors had begun a vigorous attack upon the Castle door. The whole building was fairly trembling under their fearful yells and blows.

"A bit of a fight's brewin', captain," said Trapper Tom; "and if I mistake not, somebody will lose some hair."

"Oh, I pray they will not get inside of the Castle, Tom," said Pauline. "I do not fear so much for myself, but, should the savages find Oolooah here with us, it would be her death-warrant."

"Oolooah, sweet sister," replied the Princess, "feels safe here within the Castle of Trapper Tom."

"Yes, there is a hidden power about Lake Castle that is a mystery to me," replied Pauline, "and the finding of that fire burning there when we entered adds to that mystery."

"No more than in the mystery connected with your cousin, Harry Herbert, to me, Miss Polly," replied Tom, ignorant of the fact that Pauline was Harry Herbert; "but the time has come, friends, when the mysteries of Lake Castle shall be mysteries no longer."

As he concluded, he advanced and rapped upon the stone wall with the hilt of his knife; a dull, hollow sound followed.

Instantly, almost, a section of the wall was observed to swing slowly outward, revealing a narrow passage between two walls of stone.

Had Dashing Dick, the hunter, been there then, he would have seen why Lake Castle was so much smaller on the inside, and where Trapper Tom had disappeared the night the young hunter first became a guest at the place. He would have seen that the Castle had a double wall, with a space of three feet between.

As soon as the secret door had swung open, in obedience to the trapper's summons, a figure that caused Captain Temple and Pauline to start made its appearance in the door.

It was the figure of a black bear walking erect like a man.

As the grim creature advanced into the room, a light of joy was seen to kindle in the dark eyes of Oolooah.

The bear was immediately followed by those three grim associates, of which we have made mention heretofore.

All walked erect and carried weapons, and Captain Temple discovered at once that they were persons in disguise and without a doubt the same that had kindled the fire on the hearth.

"These," said Trapper Tom, after he had permitted Captain Temple and Pauline to become fully impressed with the ferocious appearance of the four grim creatures, "are my friends and companions, and none o' ye need fear 'em."

"I understand," replied Captain Temple; "these are the spirits that haunt Clear Lake. Hal ha! ha!"

"Edzactly, captain, edzactly; and now let us prepare to kill every cussed varlet now thundrin' at my door."

"Then had we not better secure the girls in that secret room?" asked young Temple.

"No, they'll be safest in here. Besides, there are port-holes in the outer wall o' the Castle; also a secret door, and so we'll make our attack from that quarter."

"And if it is necessary," said Pauline, "Oolooah and I can take a hand in the conflict."

"We'll be enuff fur 'em, little 'un," replied Tom; "and now fur the tug, friends."

The four disguised figures returned to the secret room, and a moment later, the crash of fire arms, mingled with yells of triumph and cries of agony, rent the air.

"Whoop! whoop! hurrah! the work's begun!" roared Trapper Tom, as if suddenly inspired by the din of the conflict, and unbarring the door, he rushed out onto the platform. But he found his disguised friends were already there, engaged hand-to-hand with the savage assailants.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REVELATION.

A FIERCE and desperate struggle ensued, but it lasted only for a minute. A number of the assailants had been shot down by the defenders before they appeared from behind their covert, then the odds were against Red Falcon and his

braves, and they soon met with an ignominious defeat.

Red Falcon was slain by the hand of the bear! And but two of his braves escaped alive to tell the fate of their leader and comrades.

As the bear gazed down upon the grim face of his lifeless foe, the terrible Falcon, a wild triumphant yell pealed from his lips and was repeated time and again by his three companions. Then he drew a scalping-knife and stooped to complete his victory by securing the long, flowing scalp of the chief, but Trapper Tom interposed, saying:

"Not now, comrade—wait till mornin'. I want others to see the villain before his hair is gone."

The bear reluctantly obeyed, and the body of the chief was covered with a blanket and permitted to repose on the platform.

The little party, including the four disguised figures, now assembled in the Castle.

"Well, Tom, you and your friends made short work of them savages," said Temple.

"Yes, and I thank God from the bottom of my heart that Red Falcon, the Scourge of the Prairie, is dead as a door-nail at last, and so now, boys, you can throw aside your disguises and let yourselves be known to the world."

The last remark was addressed to the four disguised figures, who at once arose to their feet and threw aside their life-like disguises.

To the astonishment of Captain Temple and Pauline, four fine-looking young Indian warriors stood before them.

"Thar, captain," said old Tom, pointing to the tall, noble-looking fellow that had just discarded the disguise of the bear, "that chap is the missin' Elk Horn, the young chief who war defrauded o' his rights as head chief o' his tribe by that pusillanimous cuss, Red Falcon."

"Then that is your lover, Oolooah!" whispered Pauline to the Princess.

The latter's eyes dropped shyly, and a faint smile told what her lips refused to articulate.

"And these 'ere other young fellers," continued Tom, "are Elk Horn's war chiefs. You see, Red Falcon, being a white man, had wormed himself into the confidence of the Ingins by representin' himself as a chief sent to govern the Sioux by the Great Spirit. Bein' not only a great mesmerist but a magician with but few equals, he had no trouble in makin' the redskins believe his story. So when Black Buffalo died Red Falcon became chief, when by right o' heritage and election it should have come to Elk Horn here. And when Elk Horn and his friends undertook to establish their right, a traitor betrayed them and they were doomed to die. But, thanks to Oolooah, they were set at liberty on the night afore the day set for the execution. The boys sought shelter in Lake Castle, where for two years they have been concealed, and not a soul but me and Oolooah knew of their whereabouts."

"Many's the time they've been the means of saving Lake Castle, and they're the spirits that have haunted this water. I got up these disguises for the boys, and in these they went ashore occasionally to hunt a little and look after the scalp o' Red Falcon. Dashin' Dick stayed here a few nights agone, and I know he tried hard to fathom the secrets o' the Castle, but he failed. Harry Herbert, too, I think war a leetle puzzled the night o' the big fight."

A smile passed over Pauline as she said:

"Since you have revealed your secrets, Trapper Tom, and Red Falcon is dead, I will now reveal my secret. There is no such a person living as Harry Herbert!"

"What?" exclaimed Tom.

"I am Harry Herbert."

"Polly, you're jokin' now, I sw'ar ye are."

"I am not, Trapper Tom," replied Pauline.

"Je-rusalem! How could one like you perform such deeds o' darin'—pass through such dangers as Harry Herbert, to my knowledge, passed through?"

"I don't know myself, Tom. I must have been inspired with some supernatural power, for when I think back—of the time when I rescued you in the gorge, when I lay a helpless captive, bound and gagged, in this room, on the same night, and how I fought those four savages that arose from the sand, all these and many more—I grow terrified at the courage I then possessed."

"Wal, really! This beats me all to slathers! It seems more like a miracle than a common fact, and to think I didn't detect the disguise! No wonder Herbert acted so queer—never went 'bout Prairie View, and war seldom seen. But, if you were Harry, Polly, what did you go ashore for t'other night when Dick war here?"

"To see Oolooah, for I had an idea it was she

who sent the canoe adrift with the torch and five sticks in it."

"Then Ooloah told you savages were concealed in Lake Castle, eh?"

"Yes. She told me she had seen Red Falcon and five Indians enter the Castle. Red Falcon seemed to know how to open the door, and, after having been in the Castle nearly an hour, Red Falcon and one of the warriors came out, and closing the door, went away. She was sure the four that did not come out of the Castle had been concealed. She said nothing of Elk Horn and his friends being away at that time, nor even of such persons being in existence. She told me to hasten back and warn you of the hidden danger."

"But you haven't told us why you assumed the disguise of Harry Herbert."

"To satisfy myself as to who Red Falcon was. After the death of my parents, the spirit of vengeance possessed me, and I secretly resolved to avenge my friends' deaths. Ooloah and I were friends, and I revealed to her my troubles. It was then that she told me that Red Falcon was a white man, and, although she was not positive, she said she had reason to suspect Dashing Dick of being that inhuman fiend; and I could think of no other way to find out whether such was the case than to disguise myself as Harry Herbert and then watch him, without my purpose being suspected by him."

"You're a noble gal, Polly; just like those brave heroines that we read of. You are worthy of the man that loves you, gal, and I hope that this world has lots o' joys for you yet. I can never forget the young hunter that saved me the night I hung heels over head in the gorge, and he fought afterwards—by my side—no, I'll never forget him, Polly."

By means of a cunningly-devised dress, so arranged that by tucking up the skirt, and rearranging the waist, sleeves and collar, it appeared like a peculiar kind of a garb worn by the border hunter, a scarlet cap made to turn inside out, thereby converting it into a mink-skin cap, and by staining her hands and face with a preparation which she always carried, together with a mustache, which gave the masculine air to her features, she had been enabled to personate Harry Herbert without fear of detection.

By this time it was growing light without. Morning was near at hand, and so the party began preparation to escort Pauline and Ooloah to Prairie View.

Elk Horn and his companions had decided not to take up their quarters at the settlement until their tribe had had time to recover from the excitement consequent upon Red Falcon's death, then they would return to the tribe, and endeavor to establish the young warrior's right to the chieftainship of the band.

As soon as it was light enough to distinguish each other's features, Trapper Tom called his friends out onto the platform.

When they had gathered around him, he raised the blanket from the lifeless body of Red Falcon, and bade them look on the mortal remains of the scourge of the prairie.

The features of the dead were expressionless in death's slumbers, but they were regular and handsome in contour.

Trapper Tom finally knelt down and tore open the bosom of the chief's hunting-jacket, and a little cry of surprise passed from lip to lip as he did so. The skin of the chief's breast was white!

"So you see, friends, Red Falcon is a white," said Trapper Tom, and he began removing the gaudy trappings from his head. This done, he reached over the edge of the platform, and dipping up some water in his hand, began washing the paint from the dead man's face.

When this was accomplished, all gazed upon the handsome face of Dashing Dick, the hunter, the gilded traitor, the glozing fiend, Red Falcon, Scourge of the Prairie!

None but Captain Temple was surprised by this startling revelation. Ooloah, as well as Elk Horn and his companions, had known that Red Falcon was a white man, but as they had never seen him, otherwise than in disguise, they were not positive that Dashing Dick was Red Falcon, although they suspected him, and this led Ooloah to warn Pauline. Pauline, however, did not find that Red Falcon was Dashing Dick until after she was a captive in his power. Of course, the capture of Dick at the time she was captured was all a farce to cover up his villainous part in the drama, for fear she might escape before he got her to his stronghold, and if his disguise was not penetrated, he could still go on with his nefarious plans.

And now, after all had been plainly proven

against Dashing Dick, it seemed almost impossible for Pauline to convince herself that one so handsome, and apparently kind and open-hearted, could be such a heartless wretch as Red Falcon, and play his double character so well.

The chief's body was buried in the lake, a short distance from the Castle, then the little party took its departure for Prairie View.

Arrived there, a messenger was dispatched for the dragoons and Ishmael Haven and his friends, whom they had left near the Indian village the night before.

With the death of Red Falcon ended all the Indian troubles about the lake, for Elk Horn was installed as chief of the tribe, and the fidelity and kindness shown him by Trapper Tom while an exile in Lake Castle, had so deeply impressed his heart as to forever remove from his breast all prejudice against the whites.

Trapper Tom continued at Lake Castle several years after the downfall of Red Falcon, but his stronghold was no longer the seat of mysteries.

Pauline, brave, beautiful and peerless Pauline, finally wedded Captain Temple, the man of her choice, and she made him a kind, gentle, and loving wife and help-meet.

Ooloah, the Princess, became the wife of Elk Horn, and until the removal of the tribe from the territory, the chief and his dusky mate were frequent visitors at Lake Castle and Prairie View.

THE END.

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